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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Egypt...a game in the Mit Rumi Ramadan football tournament in Dakahlia – one of the oldest street football tournaments in Egypt

France...Declan Rice and Vladimir Coufal celebrate after guiding West Ham United into the Europa League semi-finals

Germany...Villarreal forward Samuel Chukwueze celebrates after stunning Bayern Munich in the dying moments of their Champions League quarter-final

Germany...Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann is drenched in beer after winning his first Bundesliga title

Brazil...tributes are paid to Colombia legend Freddy Rincon by his former club Corinthians following his tragic death

Spain...Real Betis legend Joaquin celebrates with the Copa del Rey trophy

Poland...a flare is lit as Legia Warsaw play Dynamo Kyiv in a "Match for Peace", with all profits from the game's ticket sales going to support Ukrainian refugees

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FROM THE EDITOR

Our countdown to the 2022 World Cup continues in this issue as we preview the remaining European, Asian and inter-confederational play-offs to determine the final three qualifiers for Qatar.

Three players already with their eyes on the World Cup are this issue's cover stars – Netherlands hot-shot Cody Gakpo, Portugal forward Diogo Jota and United States wonderkid Brenden Aaronson – and we shine the spotlight on the talented talismanic trio who are all having terrific seasons for their clubs.

The Ukraine conflict continues to cast its shadow, but countries around the world persist in showing their support for the war-torn nation. James Nalton provides an exclusive EyeWitness report into how America's East Coast is proving an unlikely destination for its show of solidarity and awareness-raising efforts through football, while Jared Tinslay previews what should prove to be an emotional international comeback for Ukraine as they travel to take on Scotland in the European World Cup play-offs.

European champions Italy may not have a World Cup to look forward to, but they face South American champions Argentina in the Finalissima, giving the *Azzurri* a chance to atone for their qualifying disappointment. Jim Holden discusses the merits of the newly-revived contest, formerly known as the Artemio Franchi Cup.

Following in this issue's theme of giving exposure to young talents such as Gakpo and Aaronson, this month's instalment of Talent Scout highlights the standout stars from this season's UEFA Youth League, with Nick Bidwell giving us an insight into the Champions League's next generation.

One player most definitely part of the Champions League's current golden generation is Karim Benzema who, at 34, is enjoying the best form of his already wonderful career. Colin Millar offers his incisive analysis on the purple patch for the likely frontrunner for this year's Ballon d'Or.

Whether Benzema will be able to add another Champions League winners' medal to his vast collection this season remains to be seen. Our print deadline for this edition didn't allow us to preview this season's finale (with the semi-finals concluding after our press date), but be sure to catch next month's issue which will review UEFA's showpiece occasion, along with all of Europe's other elite competitions and leagues, in our annual season review special.

Stephen Fishlock, Group Editor

> We shine the spotlight on talented talismanic trio Cody Gakpo, Diogo Jota and Brenden Aaronson, who are all having terrific seasons for their clubs

Kicked out...Russian teams face further UEFA sanctions

UEFA

Russia hit with further sanctions

Russia's bid to host the European Championship in 2028 or 2032 has been dismissed by UEFA, while the country's women's team will not take part in this summer's Euros in England either.

In March, the Russian federation declared an interest in hosting the men's tournaments, despite having already been kicked out of 2022 World Cup qualifying and having their club sides eliminated from European competitions. Yet UEFA ended any distant hopes of a Russian-hosted tournament by ruling their bid ineligible.

That ruling means that the joint-bid from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Republic of Ireland remains the favourite to host in 2028, with Turkey declaring an interest in hosting both the 2028 or 2032 tournaments, while Italy are also in contention for the latter.

Meanwhile, UEFA have also extended their ban on Russian teams to its 2022-23 club tournaments, the next Nations League, the 2021-23 European Under-21 Championship and qualification for the 2023 Women's World Cup, while Portugal will take Russia's place at this summer's Women's European Championship after losing to them in the qualifying play-offs.

Incidentally, the ban on Russian teams from next season's Champions League is a boost to the Scottish Premiership, with the winners of this season's title set to qualify automatically for the group stage.

"This is an enormous step forward in providing much-needed reform for football"

Former sports minister Tracey Crouch reacts to the government's decision to establish an independent regulator in English football

ITALY

'Super agent' Mino Raiola dies aged 54

Mino Raiola, one of the most high-profile agents in football, has died after suffering with illness since January.

Typically, for a figure who divided opinion throughout his career in football, Raiola's death was fraught with controversy. On Thursday, April 28, multiple sources reported that the agent had passed away, only for him to directly respond to the reports by tweeting that he was still alive. Two days later though, a statement from his family confirmed that he had since passed away.

Born in Italy but raised in the Netherlands, Raiola cultivated a reputation as one of the most prominent yet divisive agents in football. Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson insisted that he would never deal with him again after Paul Pogba's departure from Old Trafford in 2012.

Yet to his clients Raiola was a mentor and hero. Erling Haaland and Matthijs de Ligt, for instance, both posted tributes on social media, with the former describing him as "the best".

Both Pogba and Haaland are set for high-profile moves this summer, with the Frenchman out of contract at Manchester United and Manchester City reportedly close to agreeing a deal for the Norway striker. Both players – as well as the likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Romelu Lukaku and Gianluigi Donnarumma – will now have to decide their futures without Raiola's counsel.

Super agent...Raiola with one of his many high-profile clients, Zlatan Ibrahimovic

The month in numbers

Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football this month...

43
Championship goals scored by Fulham's Serbian striker Aleksandar Mitrovic during the 2021-22 campaign, a record for the 46-game format.

3
Consecutive home defeats for Barcelona in April – the first time in the club's history that they have suffered such a streak.

£4.25bn
Value of the late bid for Chelsea from British billionaire Sir Jim Ratcliffe at the end of April.

Spanish champion... Ancelotti celebrates with his players

1
Carlo Ancelotti is the first coach in history to win all five major European leagues after guiding Real Madrid to La Liga glory. The Italian has also won titles with Milan, Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich.

0
Number of matches played in Panama's top flight in gameweek 12 after the league's players went on strike to demand contractual improvements.

6
Number of days per month, according to media reports, that Ralf Rangnick will work at Manchester United next season after agreeing to take charge of the Austrian national team.

60
Years since Benfica last won a UEFA title (1962 European Cup) prior to their Under-19s' victory in this season's Youth League.

1
In Melbourne City's 2-1 win against Jeonnam Dragons in Thailand, Yoshimi Yamashita made history by becoming the first female to referee a men's Asian Champions League match.

12
Players that Bayern Munich had on the pitch for 17 seconds during their win at Freiburg, prompting a complaint from the home side.

41
SPFL clubs to have voted for the introduction of VAR into the Scottish Premiership from next season, with just one side voting against it.

$1.1bn
Valuation of Serie A club Milan according to a private equity firm from Bahrain, who wish to purchase the Italian giants.

6
African FAs sanctioned by FIFA following the World Cup qualifying play-offs in March. Algeria, Egypt and Morocco will pay fines, as will Senegal, Nigeria and DR Congo, who will also play one match behind closed doors.

$5m
Opening bid for Diego Maradona's "Hand of God" shirt, which was put up for auction.

1
Oldham Athletic became the first former Premier League representatives to drop out of the Football League following their relegation from League Two.

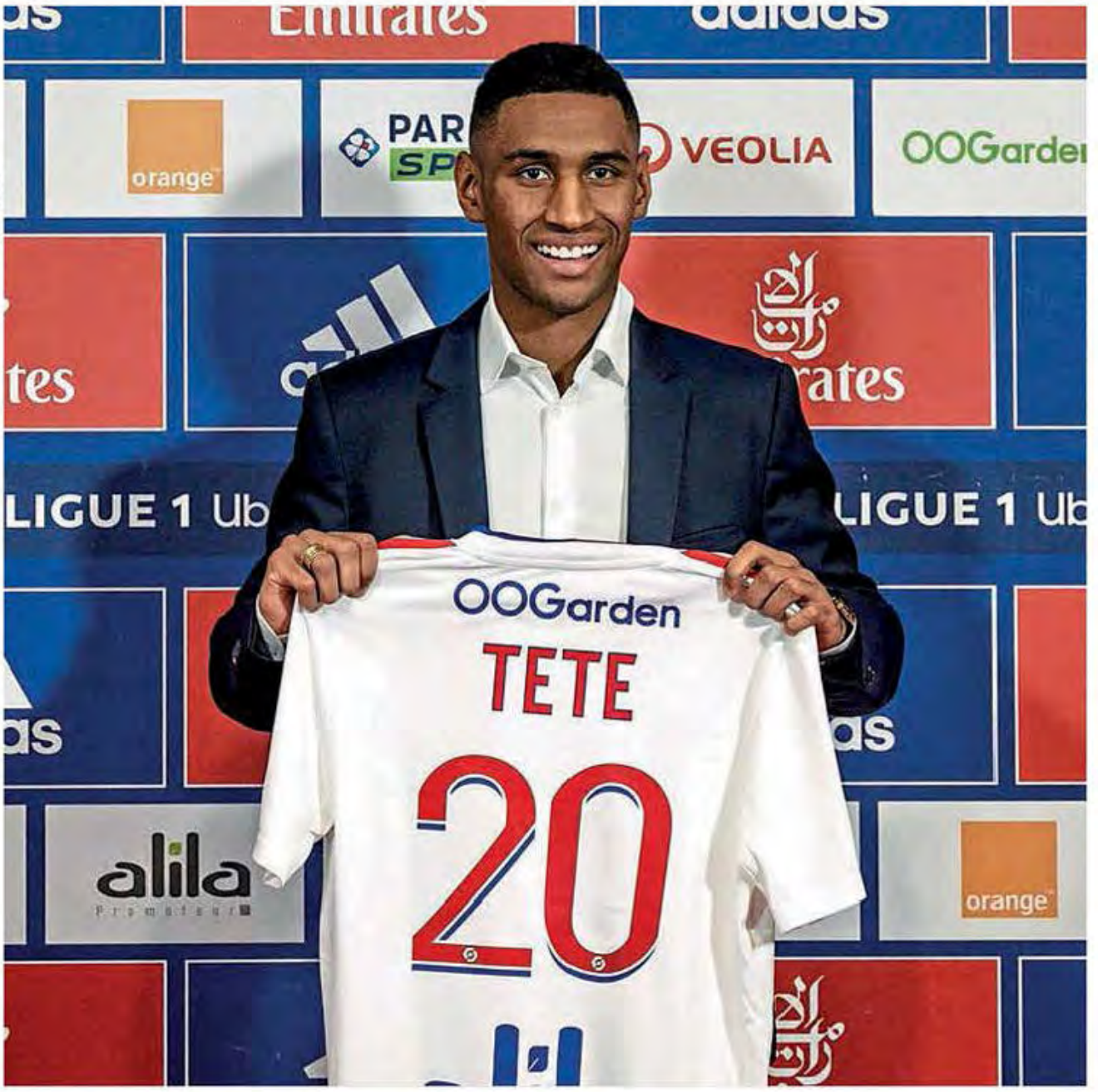
17
Years since Real Betis' last major trophy, a sequence ended by their penalty shootout win over Valencia in April's Copa del Rey final.

2
Year contract extension for Jurgen Klopp, after the Liverpool boss penned a new deal keeping him at Anfield until 2026.

Two more years... Klopp

"Girls and women are more emotional than men. So, they take a goal going in not very well"

Kenny Shiels, manager of Northern Ireland women, draws criticism while discussing his team's 5-0 defeat to England. He later apologised for his comments



TETE

(Lyon)

For most of the footballers fleeing Ukraine following the invasion by Russia, simply finding a new club and the opportunity to continue their careers has been success. But for some, it has been an opportunity to thrive, like Brazilian winger Tete.

The 22-year-old hadn't played in almost four months when he made his Ligue 1 debut at the start of April, yet still netted an 80th-minute winner with a smart finish in Lyon's 3-2 victory over Angers. His arrival boosted the club's hopes of qualifying for Europe next season, while also putting himself in the shop window.

The future of Ukrainian football remains highly uncertain, and Tete would have been closely observed by scouts even before the invasion after scoring ten goals for Shakhtar Donetsk before Christmas, including one in the Champions League. Lyon will be hoping to make his loan deal permanent.

QR CORNER

Use a tablet or smartphone to scan the QR code.

Barcelona SC's Damian Diaz scored directly from a corner in outrageous style in the Copa Libertadores.

Henrique ARAUJO
(Benfica)
The Portugal Under-21 international was the star of the show in Benfica U19s' 6-0 thrashing of Red Bull Salzburg in the UEFA Youth League final, bagging a hat-trick against the Austrians.

Jonathan GOMEZ
(Real Sociedad)
The 18-year-old full-back is the latest player to be drawn into an international tug of war between USA and Mexico. He made his Mexico debut in April – in a friendly against Guatemala – a year after winning his first USA cap.

Ben DOAK
(Celtic)
The highly-rated 16-year-old recently confirmed that he will be joining Liverpool at the end of the season, for a reported fee of £600,000.

Jamie BYNOE-GITTENS
(Borussia Dortmund)
In April, the 17-year-old forward, a former Chelsea, Reading and Manchester City academy graduate, made his senior debut for Borussia Dortmund, two years after moving to Germany.

Angel DI MARIA
(Paris Saint-Germain)
PSG have reportedly chosen not to take up their one-year option on Di Maria's contract, meaning that he will be a free agent this summer. Juventus are said to be in talks with the Argentine.

Festy EBOSELE
(Derby County)
The Republic of Ireland Under-21 international wideman will become the latest player to depart Wayne Rooney's side after agreeing to join Serie A club Udinese this summer.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

The Finalissima: a welcome return for Europe against South America

Does the world of soccer, already jam-packed full with a myriad of competitions, really need to squeeze another trophy into its relentless schedule? Are we truly excited by the latest bauble on offer: the Finalissima?

The sporting public has already delivered its emphatic answer. Tickets for the showdown between Italy and Argentina, to be staged at Wembley Stadium on June 1, sold out in just a matter of days. There will be an 86,000-capacity crowd for the clash between the champions of Europe and South America.

Many people were surprised by the clamour to attend. I can't think why. This is an occasion to cherish, a match with serious pride and honour at stake, a match with a touch of history to add meaning and context. The "Finalissima" name may be freshly-minted, but this is actually a revival of a contest played twice before, in 1985 and 1993, for the Artemio Franchi Cup, when the winning captains were Michel Platini and Diego Maradona respectively.

Watch the grainy video footage of Argentina against Denmark in the 1993 encounter and you see a bravura match between two skilful and committed national teams. Brian Laudrup almost wins it for the Danes with a curling shot against the bar. Diego Simeone's thunderbolt is then tipped away by Peter Schmeichel.

Predecessor... France's Michel Platini holds the Artemio Franchi Cup in 1985

Finalissima is different, certainly when the fixture is Italy v Argentina, two of the most storied national teams. It will have a sharp edge this time also because the Italians have failed to qualify for the World Cup later this year, and at Wembley will be handed a swift chance of some redemption.

Trophies count for so much in football careers – even the lesser ones, even the newly revived ones. Look, for example, at the "*Palmares*",

> The "Finalissima" name may be freshly-minted, but this is actually a revival of a contest played twice before, in 1985 and 1993

It goes to penalties, and Maradona is among the scorers as Argentina win 5-4 in the shootout.

Following that match the event was subsumed into the Confederations Cup, a tournament itself abandoned in 2017 because it became too intrusive in the global soccer calendar and featured too many lightweight games.

A one-off showdown like the

the honours list of the greats. Pep Guardiola has won 32 trophies as a manager, and he includes them all in his own mind – the Spanish third tier with Barcelona B, the Super Cups and Community Shields, as well as the Champions League and domestic league titles. Jose Mourinho does the same in his haul of 25 trophies; they all add lustre.

It's true also of Roberto Mancini, the Italian head coach and current *World Soccer* Manager of the Year. On his personal website he boasts 14 trophies captured as a manager, including the Super Cups and Community Shield. If number 15 is the Finalissima, it will provide further vindication of his reputation as a winning boss.

As for managers, so for players. The one caveat in the monumental career of Lionel Messi has been the lack of glory with Argentina, a failure some critics have used as ammunition for their argument that he could not be considered the greatest player of all time without national team success.

Messi began to rectify that with Copa America victory last year. That triumph is why he won the Ballon d'Or for a seventh time, and why Argentina will be at Wembley. He will now want to emulate Maradona in winning this extra trophy, driving the momentum of his Argentine side before a final attempt at the World Cup.

Then there is Argentina's coach Lionel Scaloni, back on an English stage for the first time since the 2006 FA Cup final when playing for West Ham United. He created one goal for his team, but is forever remembered as the player who foolishly gave the ball away in the dying seconds of the match, and allowed Steven Gerrard to score a fabulous long-range 3-3 equaliser for Liverpool.

Scaloni's one and only honour as a manager is the Copa America, which was also Argentina's first trophy for 28 years. He will not underestimate the value of another in quick succession.

No, we should not be surprised the Finalissima tickets sold out in a flash. In the 1993 video you can see the furious despair of Peter Schmeichel when he got his fingertips to the final penalty of the shootout but could not save it. You can see the delight on the face of Diego Maradona as he celebrated the last trophy of his career. Enough said.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

'Financial Fair Play with teeth' – UEFA's latest attempt to crack down on football finances

Remember Financial Fair Play, aka FFP? Michel Platini's magic wand to put European club football finance on the straight and narrow, clean out the swindlers and the fraudsters, and present the game in a shiny-bright new light.

It's back. Under a new name and with the same flaw: it does nothing to address the gap between the hand-to-mouth majority and the Champions League elite who want a closed shop to suit themselves and their "historical status".

Former UEFA president Platini aimed to prise the game out of the greedy hands of those he dismissed sarcastically as "administrators". Sepp Blatter noted the jibe and never quite forgot or forgave.

Platini drove into UEFA HQ at Nyon, near Geneva, with a host of ideas, some sensible, some banal. Among the latter was a desire to turn the Champions League back into the knockout cup competition of its formative years. Then the accountants gently explained the facts of financial life to him, how the group stage guarantees of multi-million TV and sponsorship contracts rendered the European federation richer than FIFA.

Hence Platini contented himself with commanding his minions to devise various complex formulae to offer a handful of middle and lower-rank European clubs the possibility of squeezing up among the elite in the Champions League group stage.

Then came FFP, a paradise for lawyers and accountants and loophole-gougers. That was not how it was intended. Platini's idea was simple: clubs that wanted to compete in Europe should provide audited proof that wages expenditure did not exceed revenue.

Illogically this was the case for dozens of clubs whose survival depended on handouts from supra-wealthy owners with personal, commercial or political reasons for burnishing their populist images. Few better vehicles than a successful football club, whether that success is judged on a national or international stage.

Platini would come up with the ideas and then hand them over to his trusty general secretary Gianni Infantino to make them work. Nowadays Platini believes Infantino to have been anything other than trustworthy but that is another story.

In many ways FFP was Infantino's proving ground. He understood the practical intricacies and made it work. Along the way this introduced him to a network of influential European politicians and lawyers to ensure FFP was compatible with European Commission regulations. The eventual edifice comprised a multi-layered strata of analysis, assessment, disciplinary sanctions and appeal procedures.

The effect was measured in hard cash. Platini, in reviewing the first three years, said: "Financial Fair Play has led to a dramatic improvement in club finances and has restored business credibility in our sport. When we began this process, financial losses stood at €1.7bn per year but now they are in the €400-500m range. In a short

Punished... Manchester City were sanctioned under FFP rules

> "Financial Fair Play has led to a dramatic improvement in club finances and has restored business credibility in our sport"
>
> Michel Platini speaking in May 2015

period of time, Financial Fair Play is achieving what it set out to do: restore the financial health of European football and put clubs on a much better and more solid financial foundation."

That was in May 2015. Just a few months later Platini was banned over the $2m "disloyal payment" from Blatter's FIFA that would ultimately see both men in the dock in Bellinzona in June accused of fraud (charges they deny).

By the time of Platini's enforced exit, FFP was working but reservations were growing. The system did nothing to redress an expanding imbalance between the rich and the poor. Also punishments such as competition suspensions appeared to be applied far more readily to the have-nots than to the haves. That suspicion exploded into daylight when high-spending (and high-paying) Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City slipped through the regulatory net.

A voluble critic that the system was broken was La Liga president Javier Tebas. In Manchester in 2017 he told me: "It's not that I don't like PSG. But what happens when this [Qatari] money comes into European football? There is an inflation of salaries and transfer fees. This is damaging football. There is an incredible risk when such money comes in from these states.

"It is not just about PSG but also Manchester City. I will always need more money from TV, otherwise Manchester City with its Abu Dhabi oil will take all the best players."

Of course by now UEFA had more problems than FFP to resolve. Platini's removal from the presidency caused a considerable hiatus before Aleksander Ceferin had got to grips with the complexities of the job. He had thought he might commute on a part-time basis from Slovenia but soon found he had been badly mistaken.

UEFA was already working on a revision to FFP when COVID-19 wreaked financial havoc across the European club game. FFP went out of the window as clubs scrambled for cash, in whatever amount and from whatever source. COVID killed off Financial Fair Play as we knew it and forced UEFA to come up with something new.

The lately-revealed Financial Sustainability Regulations sound like a system to power floodlights with wind turbines and solar panels. Not true. A better way to consider this is Financial Fair Play with teeth. Just be aware that the "fair play" label has been ditched out of embarrassment at its circumvention by PSG and Manchester City.

Wage caps and the like would be crushed by the courts so UEFA has come up with a 70 per cent squad cost ceiling on the pay of players, managers and agents when set against club revenue. The system kicks off this summer. Implementation will be graduated over three years so clubs have time to adapt. Full imposition of the new regime begins in 2025-26.

Andrea Traverso, UEFA's director of financial sustainability, believes that the original Financial Fair Play regulations had laid a solid foundation. He says: "The average squad cost at the moment is closer to 90 per cent than 70 per cent but, before the pandemic, it was between 60-70 per cent. Now that spectators and sponsors are coming back we expect the ratio to come down naturally but still it remains challenging for a number of clubs."

Traverso believes the squad costs limit will be hard to circumvent because breaches, whether through direct pay or media rights deals, would risk players falling foul of national tax laws.

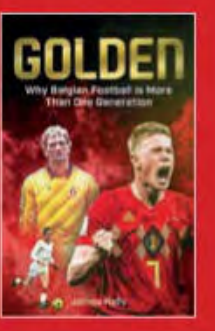
Punishments are another issue entirely. They could include prohibitions on the use of certain players, squad limits, the deduction of points or possibly even relegation from one UEFA competition to another.

Ceferin says: "UEFA's first financial regulations served their primary purpose. They helped pull European football finances back from the brink and revolutionised how European football clubs are run. However, the evolution of the football industry, alongside the inevitable financial effects of the pandemic, showed a need for wholesale reform."

The new controls are welcome if they prove loophole-free. But they do not address that financial chasm. Ceferin's "wholesale reform" remains a long way off.

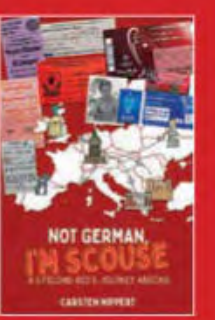
Financial Fair Play mastermind...the man behind the idea, former UEFA president Michel Platini

BOOKS THIS MONTH



GOLDEN
By James Kelly (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

The definitive story of football in Belgium, *Golden: Why Belgian Football is More Than One Generation* goes beyond the current team of stars. Exploring both domestic and international success, it relives the forgotten Belgian triumphs against football's biggest names. Packed with unsung heroes and pivotal figures from Antwerp to Waregem, it tells the tale of how a nation with a population of under 12 million has continued to make its mark on world football.



NOT GERMAN, I'M SCOUSE
By Carsten Nippert (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

Carsten Nippert's first visits to Anfield were characterised by fear when he encountered vitriolic Mancunians and Kopites whose dialect confused him, but his adventures as a passionate young fan would eventually take him to Istanbul, Athens, Kyiv and Madrid. *Not German, I'm Scouse* is the hilarious, emotional and compelling story of an unlikely Liverpool fan who became a Scouser at heart.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Everton's struggles are all of their own making

Everton's aim was simply not to lose against Liverpool; or at least to ensure that if they did it would not be too humiliating, would not do too much damage to either their self-esteem or their goal difference, both of which could be vital in the battle against relegation. It was grim to watch: one team playing football, one team doing nothing but trying to stop them, slowing the game down, breaking up play, wasting time.

Everton managed 17 per cent possession – which, depending which source you prefer, is either the lowest or the second-lowest ever recorded in a Premier League game – and, to an extent, achieved their objective: they held Liverpool for an hour and got away with merely a 2-0 defeat. Had they been awarded a penalty when Anthony Gordon went down after a nudge from Joel Matip, perhaps they could have nicked a point or more.

Certainly no team should ever be criticised for playing defensively against a side of far greater ability. Defending is as much a part of the game as attacking – even if there were occasions when an understandable caution dipped into something less palatable.

Miles apart... Liverpool and Everton

And, given where Everton were in the table heading in to the Merseyside derby, their approach was easy to understand.

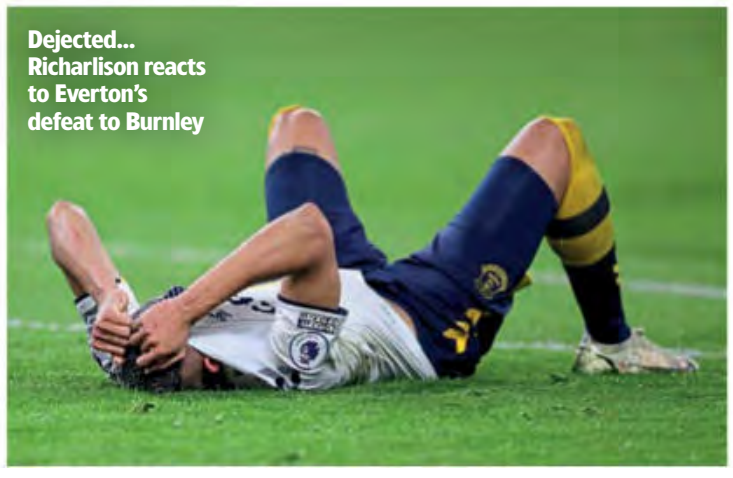
But what is less straightforward is how Everton find themselves in such a mess in the first place. This is not a case, as so often in modern football, of one club simply not being able to match the financial power of the other. Everton have their own wealthy owner in Farhad Moshiri, although the sanctions imposed on Alisher Usmanov, forcing the club to cut ties with its sponsor, may force cutbacks. Since he arrived, their net spend is £60 million more than that of their Merseyside rivals. Yet while Liverpool emerged from the derby with the quadruple still to play for, Everton found themselves in the bottom three, facing the prospect of a first relegation in 71 years.

> Just spending money isn't enough...Everton have spent money, but have done so appallingly

This has been mismanagement on a staggering scale.

It's easy to say that football is dominated by money these days and that all that really matters is how much you can spend. And to a large extent that is true. Spain and England have between them provided 50 of the last 80 Champions League semi-finalists. Money matters, and it can mitigate a host of failures of management. The likes of Chelsea or Real Madrid can make a big signing who doesn't work out and there is no real consequence. If a Borussia Dortmund or an Atalanta make a similar error, even on a smaller scale, it can affect their spending plans for years.

But just spending money isn't enough. It has to be spent well. Everton have spent money, but have done so appallingly. They have developed a habit of signing players who have been found wanting elsewhere, often at bigger clubs – the likes of James Rodriguez, Alex Iwobi, Theo Walcott and Dele Alli. Yes, sometimes a little experience, a little glamour, can be beneficial,



Dejected... Richarlison reacts to Everton's defeat to Burnley

but signing a player in their late 20s is always a gamble: they command high wages and are unlikely to have much resale value. And sometimes older players or rejects can be bargains too – as it seemed, earlier in the season, that Andros Townsend and Demarai Gray might be. But picking up expensive cast-offs from elsewhere makes no economic sense as a long-term strategy.

It hasn't worked either, though, when Everton have gone for players on the way up. Moise Kean never looked the player he had occasionally threatened to be at Juventus. Yannick Bolasie suffered serious injury. Yerry Mina has been out most of this season. Richarlison has been occasionally devastating but never consistent enough to justify the £50m Everton spent on him, nor the £85m offer from Barcelona that they reportedly rejected in 2020. That suggests issues of fortune and scouting.

And then there has been the total incoherence of some decisions. Why move on Lucas Digne and sign Anwar El Ghazi to comply with Rafa Benitez's wishes, only to then sack him almost immediately? It smacked of a complete lack of joined-up thinking, of decisions made on the hoof with no thought for the consequences.

But look at the managers Everton have had under Moshiri: Ronald Koeman, Sam Allardyce, Marco Silva, Carlo Ancelotti, Rafa Benitez, Frank Lampard...it's an astonishing mix of styles, from modern Dutch to traditional English to ambitious Portuguese to famous former player. No wonder the squad is a mess when, if it has been constructed according to any plan, it has been to meet the demands of half a dozen very disparate managers.

Perhaps Lampard will keep them up, but if Everton do go down, it will be because of problems that long pre-date him. Having money is one thing, spending it to a well-devised and consistent plan something entirely different.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Gutted... Huracan goalkeeper Marcos Diaz

1 VAR DRAMA: FROM 2-1 UP TO 2-1 DOWN

If you think your team has been the victim of a cruel VAR decision, then just listen to this report from a recent clash in Argentina's Copa de la Liga Profesional. With less than three minutes left on the clock, Huracan thought they had sealed a dramatic victory against local rivals Barracas Central through a Matias Coccaro header. The jubilant celebrations were soon stopped, though – not by an offside, but by a handball by their own goalkeeper. In springing the counter-attack that resulted in the goal, Marcos Diaz was shown by VAR to have handled the ball outside of his penalty area – not only ruling out the winner, but giving Barracas a chance to score one of their own with a free-kick on the edge of the penalty area. Inevitably, Ivan Tapia stepped up to sweep the ball home – via a wicked deflection – though not before several minutes of arguing. The drama didn't end there, with Barracas full-back Facundo Mater shown a second yellow card in the ninth minute of stoppage time, yet his team held on for a famous win and the local bragging rights.

2 CANINE CAMEO

This won't be the first time that this column reports on a dog interrupting a football match, and it is unlikely to be the last. The match in question was the first leg of Brazil's Pernambucano State Championship final between Nautico and Retro, and the dog – a German shepherd called Boris – was with the police. As his handler came onto the pitch to collect him, Boris picked up the ball in his mouth and continued to run rings around the players, before finally being put on a lead.

3 ELITE CHICANERY

Meanwhile, a match in Spain was interrupted not by a dog but by one of the coaches. Villanueva del Pardillo were drawing 1-1 with Colmenar Viejo when one of the visitors' coaches ran onto the pitch to intercept the ball as Villanueva launched a promising, late counter-attack. The coach was instantly sent off, but the ploy worked as his side held on for the draw.

4 GOING UP, GOING DOWN

Going up and down is a familiar tale for Norwich City, as they return yet again to the Championship after one year in the Premier League. Yet for their sporting director, Stuart Webber, going up and down is an idea that he is keen to take quite literally, having set out to climb Mount Everest. After revealing this ambition to *The Times*, the 38-year-old came under fierce criticism from fans at Carrow Road for a perceived lack of commitment due to its timing. "If we lose I'm upset, but my life isn't to appease Norwich fans," he said in the interview, before explaining that he climbed Kilimanjaro in January and will take on Chimborazo in Ecuador and Mont Blanc before tackling Everest next.

5 GLOBAL TOUR FOR PEACE

With the Ukrainian league suspended, Shakhtar Donetsk have embarked on a series of charity games around Europe in a "Global Tour for Peace". Their visit to Polish top-flight side Lechia Gdansk was particularly heart warming, with 12-year-old Dmytro Keda – a refugee from the heavily bombed city of Mariupol – brought on to the pitch for the final moments, with the scores level at 2-2. After a kick-around with the Shakhtar players, Keda was allowed to score the winner, before celebrating on the shoulders of the visiting players.

Heart warming ...Dmytro Keda

"We can't fight any more because of the sanctions and now Toni will leave. Our hands are tied. I don't know what would have been the outcome [without the sanctions]"

Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel explains the imminent departure of Antonio Rudiger

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Next United boss ...Erik ten Hag

EUROPE

Manchester United confirmed the appointment of Ajax head coach **ERIK TEN HAG**, with the Dutchman set to take charge in the summer.

La Liga side Granada appointed former Real Madrid assistant **AITOR KARANKA** to replace caretaker Ruben Torrecilla. Fellow strugglers Alaves hired **JULIO VELAZQUEZ** as their third manager of the season.

Former Senegal and Newcastle United midfielder **MO DIAME** joined Fuenlabrada in the Spanish second tier.

RB Leipzig agreed a deal for promising Genk goalkeeper **MAARTEN VANDEVOORDT** to join them in 2024, while Monaco's Spanish youngster **ADAM MULELE** will join Hoffenheim.

Former France international **REMY CABELLA** joined Montpellier having left Russian side Krasnodar, while **DIDIER LAMKEL ZE** joined Metz on loan from Royal Antwerp after his own spell in Russia at Khimki was cut short. Elsewhere, **JORDAN LARSSON** left Spartak Moscow for a loan at AIK, and **BOLI BOLINGOLI** returned to Celtic after his spell at Ufa was cancelled.

Talented Georgia winger **KHVICHA KVARATSKHELIA** agreed a five-year contract to join Napoli from next season.

ALON HAZAN was appointed head coach of the Israeli national team.

Real Madrid agreed a deal to sign Germany defender **ANTONIO RUDIGER** on a free transfer from Chelsea.

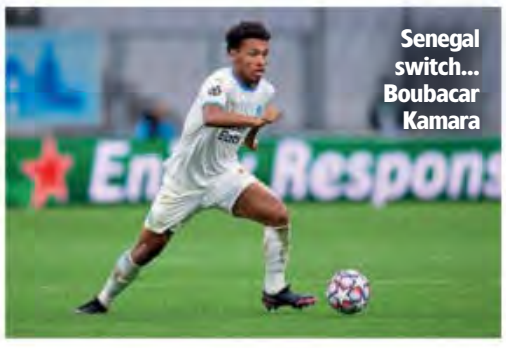
Madrid-bound... Antonio Rudiger scored against his future club in April

The Dutch FA confirmed that **RONALD KOEMAN** will return to his role as Netherlands manager when Louis van Gaal steps down after the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

AFRICA

Marseille-born midfielder **BOUBACAR KAMARA** announced that he will play for African champions Senegal at the World Cup in Qatar.

EHAB GALAL was appointed Egypt coach to replace **CARLOS QUIEROZ**, who left the role after the World Cup qualifying play-off defeat to Senegal.



Senegal switch... Boubacar Kamara

CONCACAF

In MLS, New England Revolution paid Atletico Mineiro $4 million for Colombian winger **DYLAN BORRERO**, FC Cincinnati signed Nigerian midfielder **OBINNA NWOBODO** from Turkish side Goztepe, and **GYASI ZARDES** joined Colorado Rapids from Columbus Crew.

SOUTH AMERICA

Flamengo signed left-back **AYRTON LUCAS** on loan from Spartak Moscow.

China striker **ELKESON** returned to Brazil after departing Guangzhou FC in January, joining Serie B side Gremio, while winger **PEDRO HENRIQUE** joined Internacional after a decade in Europe.

Argentine centre-back **KEVIN LOMONACO** became the latest purchase for the Red Bull group, leaving Lanus in his come country to joined Red Bull Bragantino in Brazil, while Uruguay's **AGUSTIN CANOBBIO** left Penarol for Athletico Paranaense.

Mass Ukrainian departures continue

Ukraine-based footballers have continued to seek clubs abroad following Russia's invasion and the official termination of the 2021-22 league campaign.

Shakhtar Donetsk's large Brazilian contingent continued to disperse, with forward Alan Patrick and defender Vitao moving to Internacional, and midfielder Maycon joining Corinthians, while winger Tete joined Ligue 1 side Lyon. Israeli winger Manor Solomon has been closely linked with Fulham.

Elsewhere, Luxembourg internationals Gerson Rodrigues, and Olivier and Vincent Thill left Vorskla Poltava on loan, with the latter joining Orebro (Sweden) and the other two Eyupspor (Turkey). Dynamo Kyiv said goodbye to promising wingers Vitinho (Athletico Paranaense) and Georgiy Tsitaishvili (Wisla Krakow), while English winger Kadeem Harris joined Tuzlaspor on loan from Metalist Kharkiv.

Ukraine exit...Tete arrives at Lyon on loan

EUROPE

With the club rooted to the bottom of Serie A, Venezia fired **PAOLO ZANETTI**.

Bundesliga strugglers Arminia Bielefeld sacked **FRANK KRAMER**, with Marco Kostmann appointed as caretaker.

Standard Liege fired manager **LUKA ELSNER**, with the club struggling in the bottom half of the Belgian top flight.

Manchester City's **FERNANDINHO**

"I didn't know it – you gave me the news! We will see what happens at the end of the season. We don't know what's going to happen"

Pep Guardiola reacts to the news that Fernandinho will leave Manchester City at the end of the season

Appointments, sackings and loans

confirmed that he will leave England and return to Brazil this summer.

Nantes terminated the contract of record signing **ANTHONY LIMBOMBE** after a two-year absence from the team.

Hibernian sacked **SHAUN MALONEY** as manager after just four months in charge of the Edinburgh side.

Italy defender **GIORGIO CHIELLINI** announced that he will retire from the national team, with the Finalissima clash against Argentina set to be his final game.

Burnley parted company with long-serving manager **SEAN DYCHE**, with Under-23s coach Mike Jackson taking caretaker charge. In the EFL, League One basement club Crewe Alexandra fired **DAVID ARTELL**.

AFRICA

In the wake of Nigeria's failure to qualify for the World Cup, **AUGUSTINE EGUAVOEN** resigned as manager, while Ivory Coast elected not to renew head coach **PATRICE BEAUMELLE**'s contract after they failed to reach the final stage of World Cup qualifying.

ASIA

Ex-West Ham United and Australia striker **RICHARD GARCIA** was sacked by Perth Glory after two years in charge.

Brazilian forward **ALAN KARDEC** ended his six-year stay in China by leaving Shenzhen FC.

CONCACAF

In MLS, San Jose Earthquakes fired head coach **MATIAS ALMEYDA**, and DC United sacked **HERNAN LOSADA**.

SOUTH AMERICA

After failing to qualify for the World Cup, Colombia, Chile and Bolivia all parted company with their managers: **REINALDO RUEDA**, **MARTIN LASARTE** and **CESAR FARIAS**, respectively.

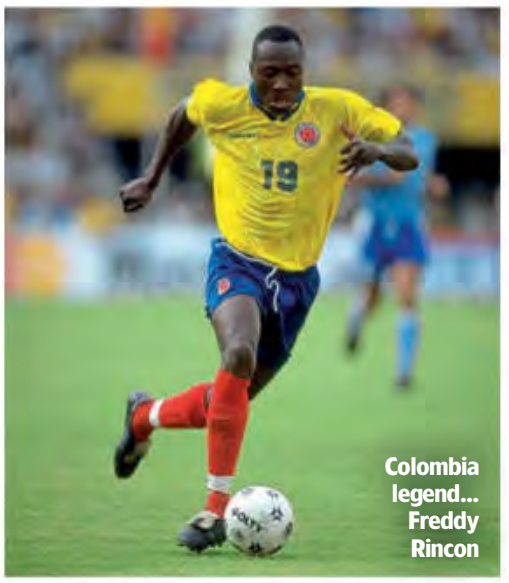
OUT

***Azzurri* legend... Giorgio Chiellini lifts the Euro 2020 trophy**

Sacked...Sean Dyche

OBITUARIES

Freddy RINCON
(1966-2022)



Colombia legend... Freddy Rincon

Colombia's generation of footballers that emerged in the 1990s to guide the nation to three consecutive World Cups – after a 28-year absence from the competition – are among the most revered in the nation's history.

Rincon is perhaps second only to Carlos Valderrama as the finest Colombian of that era. The two of them dovetailed beautifully to score one of Colombia's most significant goals of all time. With time running out on their Italia '90 campaign, Rincon raced on to a Valderrama through ball to slide past West Germany goalkeeper Bodo Illgner, and send his team into the knockouts for the first time ever.

He remained an integral part of the squad for both the 1994 and 1998 finals, and shares Valderrama's record of ten World Cup games for Colombia.

Either side of USA '94, Colombia finished third at consecutive Copa America finals, with Rincon on target in both tournaments as Colombia cemented their status as a rising force in South American football as the nation emerged from the infamous drug wars that had come to define it during the 1980s.

In his club career, Rincon won trophies both at home with Santa Fe and America de Cali and in Brazil with Palmeiras before departing for Europe. He joined Napoli on loan in 1994, before becoming the first Colombian to join Real Madrid a year later.

He returned to Brazil to join Corinthians in 1997 and led them to the first Club World Cup in 2000.

Wolfgang FAHRIAN
(1941-2022)
Former West Germany goalkeeper, starting between the sticks at the 1962 World Cup despite playing outside the top flight with club TSG Ulm. Later played for Hertha Berlin, 1860 Munich, Fortuna Dusseldorf and Fortuna Cologne.

Joachim STREICH
(1951-2022)
An iconic player for East Germany, holding the record for both goals (53) and caps (98), including two strikes at the 1974 World Cup – the only pre-unification appearance for the country. A prolific striker, Streich also holds the goal record for FC Magdeburg, the team he fired to three East German cups. After retiring in 1985, he then managed the club for five years.

Terry DARRACOTT
(1950-2022)
The youngest debutant in Everton's history when he played his first game in 1968 aged 17 years and 122 days, left-back Darracott went on to feature 179 times for the Toffees, and later worked as a coach under legendary manager Howard Kendall.

Bill SHIPWRIGHT
(1932-2022)
Former Watford and Aldershot Town defender who made 159 appearances for The Hornets during the 1950s.

Freddy HALL
(1985-2022)
The ex-Northampton Town, Toronto FC, Telford United and Limerick goalkeeper was tragically killed in a car crash in his native Bermuda aged just 37.

Steve ROWLEY
(1958-2022)
Former Arsenal chief scout who is credited with discovering Tony Adams, Ray Parlour, Cesc Fabregas, Robin van Persie, Gael Clichy, Olivier Giroud and Serge Gnabry.

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Karim Benzema

The France and Real Madrid striker is in the form of his life

"He is like a fine wine," Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti beamed in the Champions League post-match press conference at Stamford Bridge. "Every day he is getting better, showing more leadership and he has so much personality. He knows how important a player he is for us."

Ancelotti could have been speaking of any number of the superstars in his squad, from the midfield core of Luka Modric and Toni Kroos – so crucial in the four Champions League titles between 2014 and 2018 – to the thrilling 21-year-old Brazilian Vinicius Junior, who has emerged as a vital difference-maker this season.

Yet Ancelotti was hailing the player whom he is compelled to praise after almost every single game, a player he described as "magic" only weeks earlier after a similarly devastating game-defining spell. Karim Benzema had just netted a spectacular hat-trick against Chelsea within a 25-minute spell of play, a period which ultimately proved decisive in an exhilarating Champions League quarter-final tie.

In the previous round, with the Spanish titans on the brink of elimination against French giants Paris Saint-Germain – trailing 2-0 on aggregate with just 30 minutes of play remaining – Benzema scored a goal out of nothing. The Frenchman's pressing forced a dawdling Gianluigi Donnarumma into surrendering possession inside his own area, with Benzema ultimately finding the net.

Fifteen minutes later, Benzema scored again. Then, practically straight from the beleaguered visitors' kick-off, he completed a stunning hat-trick. The back-to-back Champions League trebles against the Parisians and the defending European champions – against whom Benzema scored the winner in extra-time of the second leg – were completed within a sum total of 75 minutes of play.

That is the thing with the France striker; he smells blood. Benzema's hassling of Donnarumma mirrored a mistake by Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy for his third at Stamford Bridge – the Senegalese, under pressure from the striker, saw his pass go astray and leave a virtually open net. The unfortunate Liverpool goalkeeper Loris Karius is unlikely to ever be forgotten for his high profile error in the 2018 Champions League final, yet it less well-remembered that it was Benzema whose running had prompted the mistake.

Jubilant...Benzema celebrates scoring against Chelsea in the quarter-finals

Benzema is a striker who ticks all the boxes and whose all-round game is as good as any; capable of power and accuracy with either foot and imperious in the air, as Chelsea found out with his two stunning headed goals in West London. Strongest when playing off the shoulders of the last defender, he has always been the master of finding and creating space in which he can inflict pain on the opposition and whose game has constantly evolved throughout his glittering career.

Now aged 34, Benzema's career can be divided into three very clear stages. The first was his spell as a teenage wonderkid at Lyon, where he debuted as a 17-year-old and almost instantly established himself as a star. His self-belief and drive were evident when telling his team-mates, who were in the midst of romping home to seven successive Ligue 1 titles: "Do not laugh, I am here to take your place."

The second stage was the first nine years of his stint at Real Madrid, playing primarily as a foil to Cristiano Ronaldo. Both players arrived in the Spanish capital in the summer of 2009 and would go on to form key components of a fearsome attacking unit that won

four Champions League crowns. On paper, Benzema was at the centre of an attacking trident, with Ronaldo to his left and (usually) Gareth Bale to his right. In reality the team was set up to get the best out of Ronaldo, with Benzema tasked with creating space, occupying defenders and chipping in with assists for his prolific team-mate. Not that he was short of goals – 192 in those first nine seasons – but the dynamic was clear: Ronaldo was top dog.

This continued to be the case until Ronaldo's move to Juventus in 2018. By that stage, he had obliterated Real Madrid's goal record with a scarcely believable 450 goals in 438 club appearances. His position had changed too, moving more centrally to play alongside Benzema, whose goal output dropped as a result.

The Frenchman notched just five La Liga goals during the 2017-18 campaign, his worst return since arriving in Spain. Yet the decision-makers at *Los Blancos* were in no doubt that he could fill Ronaldo's goalscoring boots; thus began the latest – and most impressive – stage in Benzema's career.

Speaking to *Mirror Football* earlier this year, Aitor Karanka – the new Granada boss who was assistant to Jose Mourinho at Real Madrid between 2010 and 2013 – explained on Benzema: "The key moment for Karim was when Cristiano left. His body language can fool you when you do not know him, but I knew that he would replace Cristiano as the leader of that team."

Benzema's goal numbers have always been fairly impressive, but he exceeded the 30-goal tally in a single season just once when playing alongside Ronaldo. Since the summer of 2018, his completed campaign goal tallies have been 30, 27 and 30, and this season he has already surpassed 40 goals.

> "The key moment for Karim was when Cristiano left – I knew that he would replace Cristiano as the leader of that team"
>
> Aitor Karanka, former Real Madrid assistant coach

His first attempt at hitting that magical 40-goal landmark came in a La Liga trip to Osasuna in mid-April. Standing on 39 strikes for the season, Real Madrid were twice awarded penalties in Pamplona and twice Benzema stepped up. Both times, Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera saved; it was the first time ever that a Madrid player had missed two penalties in the same La Liga game – and the first time since 2005 that any player from any side had done so.

The following week, Ancelotti's side travelled to Manchester City for the first leg of their Champions League semi-final. Trailing by two early City goals, Real Madrid were on the ropes. Benzema then scored a goal out of nothing, directing a wayward cross into the corner of the net with a controlled finish, while off balance, on his weaker left foot. It was typical Benzema.

City restored their two-goal advantage in the tie before the visitors were handed a chance to halve the deficit with a late penalty. Less than a week after his spot-kick failures, it was Benzema who stepped up. Remarkably, he chipped a Panenka-style penalty down the middle and into the net; the coolest man in Manchester. Goal number 41 of the campaign.

Immediately after the match, Benzema told Spanish TV: "If you don't take penalties, you'll never miss them. It's confidence, nothing more. It's all mental." If ever there was a quote to sum up the successes of Benzema and Real Madrid, a player and a team who always step up in the biggest moments, it is that.

Colin Millar

Passing on the Madrid mantle... Ronaldo and Benzema

Jojo Wollacott

The Swindon Town and Ghana goalkeeper has risen from England's eighth tier to becoming World Cup-bound

The first time Ghanaians unanimously cheered for Joseph "Jojo" Wollacott was in Kumasi, when the Black Stars faced West African rivals Nigeria in the first leg of the Qatar 2022 World Cup play-offs in March.

For a stadium that was bouncing with over 40,000 spectators, the Baba Yara went dead silent for a moment when Moses Simon worked out a rare opening in the 54th minute.

With one deft touch, the Nantes winger was through on goal, leaving him one-on-one with Wollacott. If the stadium was already quiet, that chance escalated the atmosphere to extremely inaudible levels when Simon adjusted his body to shoot.

It was almost inevitable that the ball would end up in the back of the net... almost. A second later, though, the stadium erupted with applause as Simon's effort struck Wollacott's outstretched foot. That save revitalised the home fans and gave the Black Stars a huge lift, as they battled on to hold Nigeria to a goalless draw.

Four days later, in front of 60,000 hostile supporters in Abuja, Wollacott would prove his importance again as Ghana drew 1-1 with the Super Eagles to qualify for the World Cup on away goals. Thomas Partey was Ghana's goalscorer on the day, but Wollacott was the star of the show, having pulled off three point-blank saves to deny Augustine Eguavoen's side the winner.

Playing for one's national team comes with tremendous pride, but sometimes it can also be a litmus test of a player's character and mental toughness. For Wollacott, the jury was out on him from day one.

There were those who considered him merely lucky. Some felt Ghana deserved better than a goalkeeper playing in the fourth tier of English football and others simply wrote him off as not good enough.

The Black Stars' disastrous showing at the 2021 AFCON – where the team suffered a humiliating group-stage exit – further emboldened Wollacott's unbelievers, especially after he failed to keep a single clean sheet and conceded five goals in three matches.

AFCON 2021... Wollacott competes for a cross with Gabon's Aaron Boupendza

> "Playing for Ghana, I didn't realise before I went just how much expectation there is from the country"

Swindon Town... Wollacott has established himself as No.1 at the County Ground

That it had to take the 25-year-old his eighth and ninth caps to win over the Ghanaian fans typifies Wollacott's long road to redemption.

"There was pressure on the game, not just to qualify for the World Cup but for the bragging rights of the country," Wollacott said after his heroics. "Playing for Ghana, I didn't realise before I went just how much expectation there is from the country. Football is massive in Ghana, so to deliver and make Ghana proud is the best feeling. It was probably one of the best feelings of my career."

Catechised, vilified and criticised before he even made his international debut last October, Wollacott used the World Cup play-offs to turn the censures into applause, and also

cement his position as Ghana's first-choice goalkeeper.

In many ways, Wollacott's rise at international level is similar to how he emerged from the dungeons of club football to become a regular in League Two. Born in Bristol, the goalkeeper joined hometown club Bristol City as an ambitious teenager looking to fledge into a world-beater.

However, his dream would be rocked by several loan moves. Wollacott spent eight years at his boyhood club without making a single first-team appearance, and was farmed out on loan to one club after another.

Swindon Town became the ninth loan club of Wollacott's career when he arrived in February 2021, with the move made permanent that summer. Six years earlier, the goalkeeper was plying his trade at Clevedon Town in the Southern Football League Division One South & West (England's eighth tier) and, as recently as 2019, he was lining up for Gloucester City in the National League South (the sixth tier).

While the majority of Wollacott's loan spells were in the southwest of England, he also had a brief stint with Norwegian fourth-tier side Bergsoy IL, having grown frustrated by the lack of opportunities in England.

"I don't think I had anything else on the table in England, so I thought I might as well just take a chance and go abroad, see how it is," he told *The Guardian* in January of his decision to try his luck in northern Europe. "Norway was another really good life experience. At the time it opened doors for other things when I got back."

Wollacott has gone through that door, and risen through the ranks. His is a story of hard work, patience and sheer determination. From being passed around in the oubliettes of English football, Jojo has risen to become one of the best goalkeepers in League Two, keeping his tenth clean sheet of the season in April.

And from playing in front of crowds of just over 200 supporters a few years ago, he now stands as Ghana's No.1; primed to represent the Black Stars under the microscope of millions of fans in Qatar later this year.

Emmanuel Ayamga

Ruud van Nistelrooy

Legendary Dutch striker set to take charge of his former club PSV from next season

"Van Our Man", declared PSV's Twitter account after they confirmed the identity of their new manager for next season. He may have had an outstanding playing career that took him to England, Spain and Germany, but Eindhoven can rightly claim to be his true home.

"I've been heading for this moment for years," Van Nistelrooy said. "I'm proud and convinced that I'm ready to take a leading role at this club."

Convincing words, but in reality the former striker's appointment came as a surprise. Current coach Roger Schmidt gets a lot of criticism for his occasionally inexplicable substitutions and lack of silverware, yet the German was the club's first choice for next season. But after two seasons Schmidt has decided to call it a day, with Benfica his probable next destination – although not without answering one of his criticisms, having defeated Ajax in the Dutch Cup final.

PSV didn't have to go far in their hunt for a replacement, turning to their former striker and current reserve team coach. Initially, Van Nistelrooy, who is carefully developing his career step by step, insisted that the timing was wrong: "The ambition is there, but it is too early."

His statement wasn't enough to turn off incoming general manager Marcel Brands though, who will replace Toon Gerbrands this summer. Tasked with appointing his first head coach, the former Everton director of football had his sights firmly set on Van Nistelrooy.

Brands hatched a plan to convince his top target: first, by appointing former PSV boss Fred Rutten as assistant manager. Then, by simply pointing out Van Nistelrooy's CV to him. "He showed me my resume," said the former striker. "Two years assistant of Guus Hiddink at the national team; assistant at Euro 2020; assistant of Phillip Cocu at the first team; three years coaching PSV Under-19s and one season at the reserve team.

"Brands said: 'What else could you do to get closer to the first-team job?' That was the last push."

Van Nistelrooy, 45, retired as a player in 2012 after an outstanding career involving Den Bosch, Heerenveen, PSV, Manchester United, Real Madrid, Hamburg and Malaga. He scored 349 goals in 592 games in club football. He also hit 35 goals in 70 national team appearances.

> "I've been heading for this moment for years. I'm proud and convinced that I'm ready to take a leading role at this club"

Soon after hanging up his boots, he started his coaching career. This season, his Jong PSV side are on course for a mid-table finish in the second tier, but more importantly he has helped nurse talents like Cody Gakpo and Jordan Teze.

He will not be the first club icon to sit in the PSV dugout in recent years, and the club hopes that he will follow in the footsteps of Phillip Cocu – three-time Eredivisie champion and Dutch Cup winner in 2012 – rather than Mark van Bommel. The latter, a former midfielder who also learnt his trade in the youth ranks and as an assistant, initially had the board's full confidence. Yet despite winning his first 13 league games, a club record, he was sacked in his second season due to poor results and a poor relationship with people at the club.

Van Nistelrooy can only hope that he remains PSV's man for a longer period.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Next PSV boss... Van Nistelrooy has worked at the Eindhoven club since 2018

Aljosa Asanovic

Zambia's new head coach tasked with returning the nation to its former status

Just over a decade ago, Zambia won their first Africa Cup of Nations as their modest squad saw off the mighty Didier Drogba and his Ivory Coast team-mates on penalties in Gabon. But since the heady success of 2012, Zambia have suffered a rapid decline after decades of being perennial qualifiers for the AFCON finals.

The defence of their title proved all too brief in 2013 in South Africa, and they also went out in the group stage of the 2015 finals in Equatorial Guinea. For the three subsequent tournaments, they failed to qualify in what has been a major blow.

Changing that narrative is the immediate ambition of new coach Aljosa Asanovic, appointed in January and eager to begin the rebuilding process when the Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers start in June.

"Qualifying for the 2023 Cup of Nations finals in Ivory Coast is my main target and, for a football-mad country like Zambia, it's the absolute minimum," the Croatian tells *World Soccer*. "It's not a maybe for me. People might think I'm being over-optimistic or arrogant, but I have to set this goal to convince the players to come with me on the journey."

Asanovic, 56, spent six months before his appointment as the technical director of the Football Association of Zambia and so had something of a head start when he replaced Beston Chambeshi.

Getting to know the local league has been a bonus but the focus is working on building a team with the likes of UK-based Patson Daka, Enock Mwepu and Fashion Sakala as the core of his selection. "We have guys who are playing in the Premier League, which is the best championship in the world as far as I'm concerned," he says of Leicester City striker Daka and Brighton midfielder Mwepu.

"Everyone is talking about them, and this they deserve, but there are many others who can also be crucial for us.

"We have about 17 players at clubs in Europe and they are the ones who will bring the extensive experience to the national team."

Missing out...Zambia went out in the second round of 2022 World Cup qualifying

Talented generation... Enock Mwepu (L) and Patson Daka (R)

In his first games in charge in March, as they beat Congo in a friendly but lost to Iraq and Benin, Asanovic picked English-born defender Frankie Musonda, who plays at Raith Rovers, and unheralded Aime Mabika, fresh from signing his first professional contract with MLS outfit Inter Miami.

But Asanovic also sees much talent domestically and rates the Zambian league as competitive. "It's strong and athletic and with powerful players, maybe lacking a little on the tactical discipline side but in the national team this is something we can easily work on."

> "I really believe I know how I can put Zambian football back to a high level"

With the locally-based players he says they will have a good tilt at the next African Nations Championship,

the tournament for quasi national teams made up of home-based players only. The next CHAN finals are in Algeria in January 2023.

Before his move to Zambia, Asanovic had been an assistant coach for his own country's national team, before scouting the diaspora for the federation. He also worked at clubs in Russia, Australia and Saudi Arabia.

The much-travelled former central midfielder is hoping his own experience as a player with the burgeoning Croatia team of the 1990s will help as he takes on his first national team job.

In the last years of Yugoslavia, he was one of the league's leading players with Hajduk Split and in 1990 played for Croatia in their first international since World War II, going on to win 62 caps and reach the 1998 World Cup semi-final in France. His club career took in spells at Metz, Cannes, Montpellier, Real Valladolid, Derby County, Napoli, Panathinaikos and Austria Vienna.

"I'll never forget these parts of my life, but that was a long time ago. Now I'm a coach and I really want to put everything I can into the job. This is a crucial moment for Zambian football, and I really believe I know how I can put Zambian football back to a high level.

"We have massive potential, and I will do everything to make this country happy again," he adds.

Mark Gleeson

New man in charge...Aljosa Asanovic

Fabio Carvalho

Highly-rated Fulham youngster agrees summer move to Liverpool

If at first you don't succeed, try again; that was Liverpool's attitude to the capture of Fulham youngster Fabio Carvalho. After time ran out on deadline day of the January transfer window as the Reds tried to secure a last-minute deal for the 19-year-old, they have now got their man.

In form...Carvalho celebrates scoring in this season's Championship

In reality, the delay makes no difference, given that the initial plan was to loan Carvalho back to the Championship leaders until the end of the season anyway. A move to Anfield was inevitable, with his current contract due to end in the summer and a five-year deal at Anfield already agreed. Given his age, a fee had to be negotiated: £5 million up front, £2.7m in add-ons and a 20 per cent sell-on fee.

So, what have Liverpool got for their money? An outstanding young talent, it seems.

Fulham's return to the Premier League had been all but mathematically safe for a while, before finally confirming promotion in mid-April with a 3-0 win over Preston North End. Carvalho has played no small part in that: operating behind Aleksandar Mitrovic, the Championship's record-breaking goalscorer, he had nine goals and seven assists when Fulham's promotion was confirmed, while only two teenagers (Alex Scott of Bristol City and Peterborough's Ronnie Edwards) had played more minutes in the top two divisions this season.

Regular watchers of Fulham highlight his work rate without the ball, as well as his technical ability with it, making him an attractive recruit for Jurgen Klopp's notoriously high-pressing side.

The move will see Carvalho reunited with his former team-mate Harvey Elliott. As well as graduating from the Fulham academy together, the pair also played in the same England Under-17s side.

Carvalho remains a target for Gareth Southgate and England, despite winning two caps for Portugal's Under-21s in March. Born in Lisbon, he moved to London at the age of 13 and remains eligible for the Three Lions, and Southgate recently told *The Athletic* that he is a fan of the youngster: "We would like him in our Under-21s but he hasn't got an English passport," he explained. "He was able to play in our younger age groups without a passport but he's got to pass the tests to be able to get the passport, so we couldn't select him for the [Under]-21s. We'd like to have done that."

Whether an outright tug-of-war breaks out between Southgate and his Portuguese counterpart Fernando Santos will depend on how quickly Carvalho settles on Merseyside. Klopp's tendency is to break players in slowly as they adjust to his style of play, but a successful pre-season could see the youngster elevated into the first team – as Elliott proved last summer, starting the campaign as a first-team regular before suffering a fracture dislocation of his left ankle in September.

> "We would like him in our Under-21s but he hasn't got an English passport"
>
> **England manager Gareth Southgate**

Fulham may harbour hopes of landing Carvalho on loan for another season, as they bid to end their cycle of yo-yoing between the top two divisions, but if he lives up to his reputation as one of the most promising young players in the country, Liverpool will want to keep him close.

Jamie Evans

eye witness

James Nalton reports

UNITED STATES

Ukrainian solidarity alive and well on America's East Coast

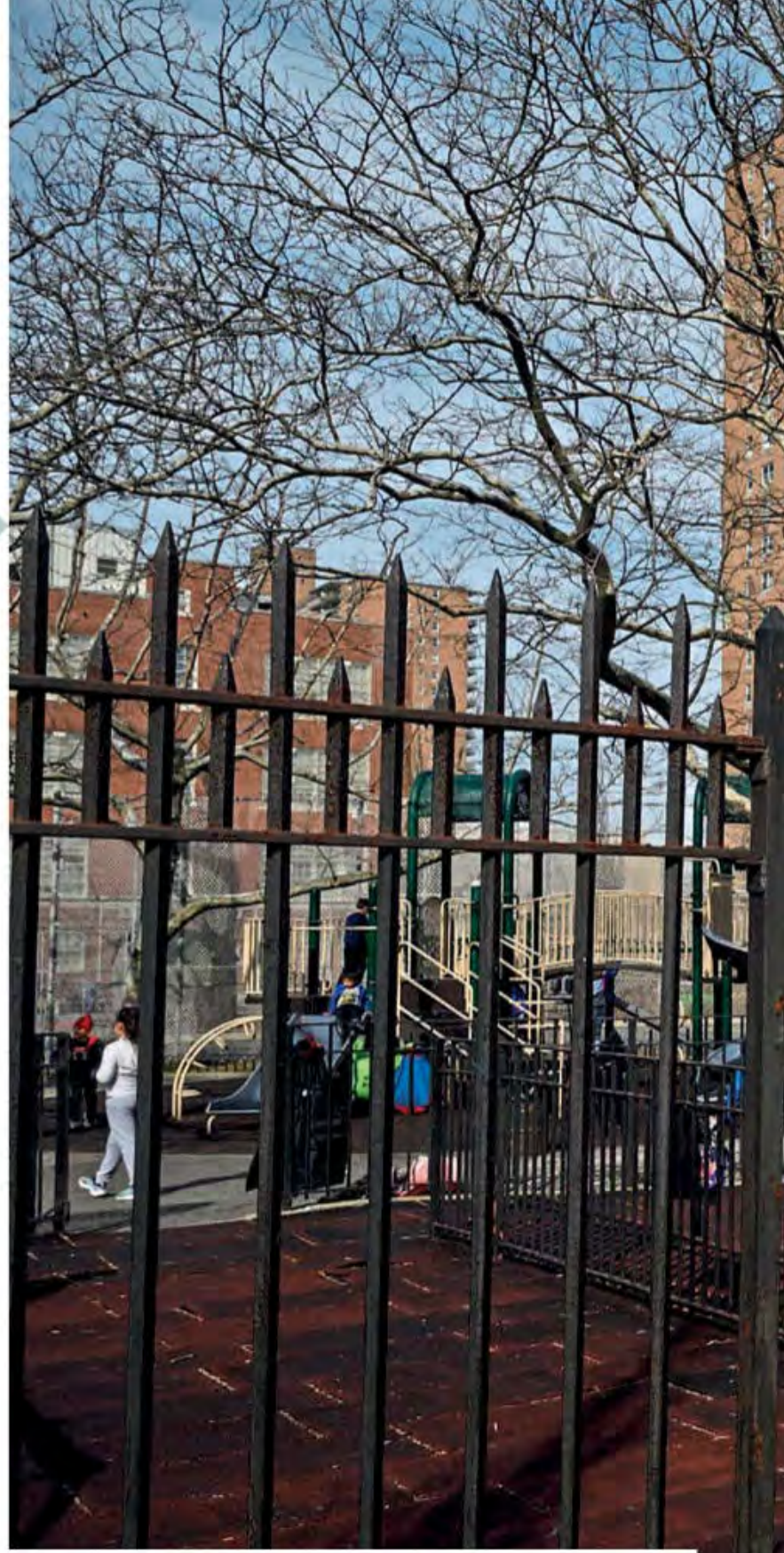
Thousands of miles from Ukraine, on the East Coast of the United States, two distinctly Ukrainian soccer clubs are flying the flag for the Eastern European nation, showing solidarity and raising awareness through football.

Like many lower league clubs in the area, the Ukrainian Nationals and the New York Ukrainians were formed by immigrant communities in their respective cities, and retain to this day the identity evident in their clubs' names.

In Philadelphia, the identity of the Ukrainian Nationals Soccer Club is one of a wide range of cultures in the diverse Pennsylvanian city. The Nationals themselves are part of a larger Ukrainian sports club and group of institutions that retain the language and emblems of their country of origin. Some of this has rubbed off on others, and has in turn helped raise awareness of the current plight of people in Ukraine.

"Our cooperation is part of a broader community," says Eugene Luciw, an executive on the board of directors at the Ukrainian American Sport Center – Tryzub, of which the Nationals are part. "We ourselves are not by any means exclusively Ukrainian players. I would say that maybe 15 to 20 per cent of our players are of Ukrainian heritage.

"Our effort to open up to the



Culture clubs...players of New York Ukrainians and FC Japan pose ahead of a match

broader community ultimately led to the success of our club but, the way I put it, we turned the broader community into Ukrainians. They call themselves Ukrainians, they call themselves Ukrainian families, so I think we raised awareness, which then precipitates further action."

Internationally, football's support for the Ukrainian people in response to Russia's invasion of their country has been compassionate, genuine and, most important of all, useful. The definition of football in the sense it is used here is the game, the supporters, the clubs, their staff or volunteers, and their communities. The sport has shown throughout history that it is able to highlight political problems but also go beneath the political layer to help where it's most needed. This has been reinforced in recent months.

Flying the flag... a Ukrainian flag on display in Brighton Beach, known as "Little Odessa," New York

Football in Ukraine has understandably been put on hold during the crisis, but by continuing to play in their own country the Nationals and the Brooklyn-based New York Ukrainians have been able to raise funds as well as awareness. This has also encouraged opposition sides to support these efforts.

> "We play here in Brooklyn, but our minds and our hearts are in Ukraine"
>
> **Iurii Vovk, New York Ukrainians board member**

"We play here in Brooklyn, but our minds and our hearts are in Ukraine," says Iurii Vovk, a former player and now a board member at New York Ukrainians. "We have to do what we can, and this is how we can respond to the crisis. If we stopped playing we wouldn't be able to meet our opponents and no one would get the chance to ask any questions. We spread the word within the community, within the Cosmopolitan Soccer League where we play.

"If people know that tomorrow's game is against the New York Ukrainians, before the games players from different teams come to us,

COMING TO PHILA.—DON'T MISS IT.

INTERNATIONAL SOCCER CLASSIC

DUNDEE OF SCOTLAND

A SCOTTISH MAJOR LEAGUE PRO CLUB

VERSUS

UKRAINIAN NATIONALS

UNITED STATES CHAMPIONS

SUNDAY, MAY 14 4:00 P.M.

Edison H. S. Stadium 29th & Cambria St.

Here's a chance to see some of Scotland's finest professional soccer players display their skills for the first time in the city of Philadelphia. The Philly Uke Nats too have some ball artists!

Come early and you'll be able to meet the players personally, get their autographs, and take their pictures with your camera. Band music will be provided before the game and halftime intermission.

This is one soccer clash worth much more than the $3 for men, the $2 for ladies, or the $1 for teen-agers, which is the price of admission to see these two great professional teams perform in an unprecedented major league attraction in Philadelphia. Yes, there is no charge for kiddies under age 13! So why not bring out the whole family to see it?

Tickets Now On Sale At: Wm. Penn Ticket Agency 1218 Chestnut Street; Ukrainian-American S.C. 4932 North Broad Street; Tickets Now On Sale At: Central Ticket Agency 1422 Chestnut Street

This special game is sponsored by the American Soccer League and is sanctioned by the United States Soccer Football Association, governing organized soccer!

DUNDEE of SCOTLAND

Front row, left to right, B. Hay, trainer; A. Bryce, B. Campbell, B. Cox, K. Cameron, D. McKay; Aitcell, manager; middle row, B. Wilson, D. Swan, S. Murray, J. McLean, A. Hamilton S. Wilson, J. Scott; back row, G. Stewart, J. Easton, A. Donaldson, A. Arrol, G. Mc Lean, R. Selway.

UKRAINIAN NATIONALS

PHILADELPHIA 1966–1967 UKRAINIAN NATIONALS

History...excerpts from a late 1960s matchday programme

shake our hands, and ask: 'How are you guys doing? Do you have any relatives there?' and what's going on. Everyone is so supportive."

This is reflected in Philadelphia where the Nationals have been raising funds for the Philadelphia-based United Ukrainian American Relief Committee (UUARC), with whom they have partnered. "Two of our opposing teams delivered cheques made payable to the UUARC, one in the amount of $1,000, one just under that, because these opposition teams took up collections," adds Eugene Luciw. "All of the teams we play, will, at this time in some way, shape or form, show solidarity with Ukraine.

"Typically there will be a joint photograph taken with the Ukrainian flag. I was touched by one opponent that arrived to play with the Ukrainian flags pinned to their jerseys.

"Our teams simply being Ukrainian and having the Ukrainian colours and emblem just lights up awareness throughout. We're a very well-known and successful club in our area regionally, and even nationally, such that the word Ukraine, the colours, leads to constant awareness."

The success Eugene speaks of is perhaps a surprise to some outside the United States. It's easy to think of American soccer solely in terms of the relatively short-lived National American Soccer League (NASL), graced by the likes of Pele, Johan Cruyff and George Best, and the current top division, Major League Soccer (MLS), which itself is only 27 seasons old.

But the side from Philadelphia are among the most successful teams in American soccer history. The US Open Cup is the longest-running national competition in the country, having first been contested in 1913-14, and the Nationals have won it four times.

In a country where true regional-to-national competition is rare due to the franchise system and a lack of promotion and relegation, the Open Cup is one of the ways to measure historical success, and the Ukrainian Nationals are right up there as one of the most successful clubs. Only two sides have won it more – Bethlehem Steel and Maccabee Los Angeles – and they are both now defunct.

In terms of the wider picture of US sport, where the concept of the "franchise" can sometimes mean teams struggle to forge an identity, these clubs and many others like them in the lower leagues offer it naturally rather than through branding or marketing.

Therefore, it's not just past success that makes these clubs important. That they retain roots that date back to the middle of the last century is also a big achievement in the American soccer landscape.

In a nation where, over the years, sports teams regularly disband, rebrand, or even relocate due to the franchise model seen at the top level, these clubs have endured, and this sees them come into their own in moments like these.

"It becomes a natural community," Eugene Luciw continues. "Folks who never experienced that natural tie of community, even in soccer fellowship, with a heritage to it, however that heritage may be defined, that's where they felt a strength. They didn't need to develop the brand. If you are branded,

you can quickly become de-branded if your success level goes down.

"When we might sag, which happily hasn't happened in a while in terms of success level, we have the heritage to hang on to and it's almost as if you don't feel that little bump in the road. Even a non-Ukrainian can say: 'This is a Ukrainian club, this is where I belong,' but others belong here because we're part of a heritage. I don't have to brand myself and recreate myself in a commercial way."

There is a sense that though they have a distinctly Ukrainian identity, the Nationals are an international family. Americans, Irish, German or other heritage who have passed through the club will still refer to it as their Ukrainian family.

There is a similar social aspect to the New York Ukrainians whose doors are open to all in the City's five boroughs and beyond.

"People come and see the players, they talk to them, they come to the club and they say: 'Wow, this is a history'," explains Iurii Vovk. "Here you can get a beer after the game and hang out with your colleagues and talk about soccer. They feel this is not just a regular team where you come just to stay fit or just to play the games. This is where it gives you a little extra, this is like a family, a team that's united."

In terms of on-pitch success, the New York club also have an Open Cup win to their name, in 1965 (a year before the Nationals won their fourth), and claimed Cosmopolitan League titles in 1966 and 1967.

NY Ukrainians still compete in New York's Cosmopolitan League, while the Philadelphia Ukrainian Nationals will participate in the National Premier Soccer League's (NPSL) Keystone Conference for 2022 as they look to return to winning ways in senior football.

When describing what keeps the Ukrainian Nationals going and what compels those involved in such organisations to run them so passionately, Eugene Luciw explains that it is all rooted in past and current events which have threatened the very existence of Ukrainian identity and culture.

"What drives this in our community? Too many people have tried to get us to stop," he says. "If people have tried to obliterate you and wipe you off the map, you can at least have a dedication to preserving that culture here. That's what I think drove people to have a club like this.

"It's almost like a saintly mission. It's an obligation. You can't not do it. Because of the efforts that were made, it's a sacred obligation. Especially in the past, we were the ambassadors of Ukraine. When Ukraine had no embassy, clubs like ours, cultural centres like ours, we were the ambassadors of Ukraine, we kept that concept going."

> "What drives this in our community? Too many people have tried to get us to stop. If people have tried to obliterate you and wipe you off the map, you can at least have a dedication to preserving that culture"
>
> **Eugene Luciw, Ukrainian American Sport Center – Tryzub**

These two clubs, formed independently of each other in the middle of the last century and existing thousands of miles from Ukraine, are helping the country's people as best they can.

They are well positioned to do so thanks to a heritage that goes back to the 1950s and thanks to the way football can raise awareness through the meetings of team-mates, fans, staff and the equivalent on opposing teams each week.

They have had a spotlight shone on them in undesirable circumstances, but from their visual identity as soccer teams to the related work those involved with the clubs do from day to day, and because of it, they have been key responders in football's international effort.

Open Cup...Philadelphia Ukrainians' trophy display

US champions...a poster advertising Manchester United's tour match against Philadelphia Ukrainian Nationals in June 1960

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

MAURITIUS

A year without football

Flying the flag...the players line up for the national anthems *(Credit: MFA)*

Caption

A handful of fans cling to the wire fencing outside of Mauritius' new sports centre at Cote d'Or. Inside is a sight hardly seen on the Indian Ocean island for the last year: a football match.

And not just any game; a vital 2023 Africa Cup of Nations preliminary qualifier between the home side and Sao Tome and Principe. The winners go to the group stage and a guaranteed six matches with some of the continent's major players. The losers are left with friendlies and regional tournaments.

Financed by China and Saudi Arabia, the Cote d'Or National Sports Complex is the impressive new home of Mauritian sport with a pool, athletics track, judo hall and football ground with a top notch artificial surface.

The site's first international was just three days earlier, when Mauritius lost the "away" leg of their AFCON qualifier to Sao Tome. Sao Tome's home ground is not certified by FIFA as safe to stage internationals so both games are in Mauritius. Home advantage would have been a big help for Mauritius, but a defensive mix-up gifted Sao Tome's journeyman striker Luis Leal a goal.

Mauritius have only qualified for one AFCON finals, back in 1974. Since then, pickings have been slim. In the 2017 AFCON qualifiers, they stunned Rwanda – a team 100 places higher in FIFA's rankings – and also beat Mozambique, but have not played in the group qualifying stages since.

Mauritius have won the football at the multi-sport Indian Ocean Games twice, in 1985 and 2003, and reached the final at the last edition in 2019, losing 1-0 on penalties to Reunion after a 1-1 draw, but that is only for locally-based players. Producing a consistent team for big matches like AFCON qualifiers is difficult as bringing overseas-based players over for friendlies is problematic.

"If I was going to somewhere far away to play a friendly I would come back tired and I don't think my club would want me to go," says the team's titanic centre-half and captain, Lindsay Rose, who plays in Poland for Legia Warsaw.

Born in Rennes, Rose represented France from Under-18 to Under-21 level before being persuaded to play for the land of his father in 2017. In four years, Rose managed just five appearances prior to the Sao Tome ties and bemoans the inequalities of the qualifying system.

"If we lose then we don't play for two years. That's why I haven't played so many games," he says. "We have to play qualifiers to play in the qualifiers. It's unfair. In Europe, there are countries that would not make the groups. We

Pre-match photo... Mauritius players before kick-off
(Credit: MFA)

need to play as many qualifying games as Europe.

"I'm in a WhatsApp group with Kevin Bru and some of the other overseas players. All the overseas players want to play. This is my dream and I want to show Mauritius in Africa.

"It's a big honour for us. But it's a disaster for Mauritius that they stopped the league. If they can't play, then we can't qualify."

And there lies the rub. The Mauritian national league has not been completed since 2019. In March 2020, the Super League stopped with Grande Riviere ahead of Bolton City on goal difference on 30 points after 13 rounds but never resumed.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased, a new season started. Grande Riviere established a commanding 15-point league at the top but games ceased in March 2021, again after 13 rounds. Since then, there has been no club football at all.

Incredibly, a national team is expected to play its most important set of matches in two years with a pool of local players who have not played any matches for a year.

New coach Tony Francois did get to take his team to Nepal for a pair of friendlies at the start of 2022, which were both lost 1-0. The team went on a training camp in Portugal and played local sides. There was also a 0-0 friendly draw at home to Seychelles, but the lack of regular club football is hardly ideal.

Francois met overseas-based players for the first time in the week before the AFCON games, while others like Rose and Bru return after lengthy absences.

The ageing but influential Bru – now in France with Versailles – has managed 19 appearances in just over a decade but remains committed to the cause. "The last time I played was three years

Opening goal...Kevin Bru opens the scoring from the penalty spot *(Credit: MFA)*

ago," says Bru. "It's very important that we qualify for the group. When you are in the group, you know you will play the good teams.

"When you are preparing to play a game and you have not played for two years it's crazy. It's terrible that there is no league. In France or England you could never stop the league because of the money."

Unfortunately Mauritius is no stranger to the club game grinding to a halt. The last hiatus was not due to a global pandemic but was equally deadly.

Unlike most countries, football in Mauritius developed on communal grounds with teams like the Tamil side Sunrise, Muslim Scouts and Fire Brigade, whose support came from the African Creole community.

Crowds were large, but communal differences were often settled inside football stadia. The government forced clubs to drop communal names, but the ties remained. In 1999, a title decider game between Scouts and Fire Brigade led to a riot that spread to Port Louis and a fire at the L'Amicale Casino that killed seven people.

Head coach...Tony Francois (centre-right) sings the national anthem with his staff *(Credit: MFA)*

Football was stopped, all clubs were dissolved and new teams formed based on towns, but some ties have never really gone away – Pamplemousse draw support from Fire Brigade's old base and Grande Riviere remain linked to Sunrise – and new teams have not gained strong following.

While there were no games being played, interest in local football withered and local fans switched to watching the Premier League on TV. There are few better examples of the damage that the English top flight can inflict on

Top facilities... Mauritius' new sports centre at Cote d'Or
(Credit: Steve Menary)

small footballing economies than in Mauritius.

At one point, the government even stepped in to help fund full-time professional squads, but those grants were disappearing as the virus hit.

MFA technical director Zunaid Mall says: "There are a lot of Liverpool and Manchester United fans in Mauritius. We need to think about when we are playing games so it doesn't clash with the Premier League and the other big leagues. Friday nights under lights would be good as there's a good atmosphere."

Even when the league resumes, further changes to COVID-19 rules will be needed as gatherings of more than 50 people are banned. The government made an exception for the two Sao Tome games. Up to 250 people, including players, staff, officials and media were admitted to Cote d'Or, including the Republic's president, Prithvirajsing Roopun.

Francois' team could not have made a better start with Bru coolly slotting home a penalty on 25 minutes after a clear handball. A lack of composure saw the visitors equalise immediately from the restart though, through Finnish-based forward Ricardo Cardoso, who slid home.

When Leal scored a second a few minutes later, Mauritius looked doomed and the handful of supporters outside the stadium dissipated.

> "If we lose then we don't play for two years. That's why I haven't played so many games"
>
> **Lindsay Rose, Mauritius captain**

Francois' tactics of playing with a single forward left Dylan Collard isolated, and while Rose controlled the centre of defence the flanks were frequently exploited by the lively Cardoso.

Collard equalised early in the second half but Mauritius again conceded from the restart following a fantastic Cardoso strike. Francois' team never gave up and the late introductions of experienced midfielder Kevin Perticots and one of the island's most promising players nearly won a thrilling game.

After netting 53 goals in 86 appearances for club side Boulet Rouge and a strong performance at the 2019 COSAFA Cup, forward Ashley Nazira won a contract with San Diego Loyal in the USL.

No player from Mauritius had ever played in the USA. Nazira only managed a couple of appearances before being released and returning to play in the neighbouring French territory of Reunion. Nursing an injury, he did not start against Sao Tome but after being introduced equalised late on to set up a rocking finish.

Driven on by the appearance of a drum, Mauritius poured forward but Sao Tome ultimately held on. Mauritius created sufficient chances to win the game but were undone by a lack of composure. Asked what he needed to have won the tie, Francois sighed afterwards: "More time."

For Mauritius, there will be plenty of that now. The Indian Ocean Games returns next year in Madagascar but only for local players. The regional COSAFA Cup offers international football but the next AFCON qualifiers remain two years away.

"It's been difficult times, we've lost a lot of time to COVID and the restrictions," says Mall. "Our pathway is to mirror what Comoros have done and make sure that we can play on the continental stage. COSAFA is fine but we need the continental stage."

Mauritius have talented junior players and in 2017 reached their first major youth final at the COSAFA Under-17 tournament, losing only to Zambia.

"It was a full house at the St Francois Stadium, it was bouncing and they had to close the gates," adds Mall, who was there. "You can see the passion of the people."

The player of that tournament, Jean Yannick Aristide, was playing for Mauritius against Sao Tome. Mall believes that now is the time to bring through more youngsters as football in Mauritius remerges from the twilight of the virus into an uncertain future.

eye witness

Emanuele Giulianelli reports

AZERBAIJAN

A long-awaited homecoming

Qarabag are on course to win the ninth Azerbaijani Premier League title of their history. And maybe, for the first time, they'll be able to celebrate this achievement in their hometown, Agdam.

The club belongs to a disputed region that, sadly, has become famous for a long war between the Azerbaijani army and the self-proclaimed independent republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. The conflict is one of the many legacies of the Soviet Union.

The name Nagorno-Karabakh embodies all the complexity, cultural richness and contradictions of a region in which the word "peace" disappeared from the vocabulary 30 years ago. While Nagorno is a Russian adjective that translates as "mountainous", Karabakh – the traditional pre-Soviet name for the region – is made up of two words of different origin: *kara*, meaning "black", and *bakh*, meaning "garden", a term from the Farsi language. To make the mixture even richer and the tangle more inextricable, the local Armenian population uses the term Artsakh to describe this rocky and harsh patch of land, wedged between Armenia and Azerbaijan and disputed by the two countries for decades.

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War ended in 1994 with the Bishkek Protocol, which was nothing more than a ceasefire agreement between the contenders, failing to solve the territorial disputes and leaving the war without real winners or losers.

To cut a long and messy story short, after the break-up of the USSR the region was officially considered part of the newborn Azerbaijan Republic. But the majority Armenian population didn't accept this and decided to proclaim their independence. They were supported in this decision – politically and militarily – by Armenia, another newly independent post-Soviet state.

Agdam itself had never been part of Nagorno-Karabakh, but was in one of the districts that the Armenian army occupied during the war and was torn away from Azerbaijan. The city was captured in July 1993, for the importance of its strategic position, and razed to the ground. In the same year, Qarabag won the top flight of

Azerbaijan flag... Qarabag midfielder Gara Garayev celebrates a Europa League victory

"You're a part of my motherland"... Qarabag fans unveil a banner against Roma

the independent Azerbaijan for the first time.

"Agdam was a beautiful city, with fertile ground for farming, fresh air, clean water and, most importantly, kind and courageous people," says Elshad Khudadatov, born there in 1965, who built his entire career as a footballer for Qarabag.

This history explains why Armenian midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan chose not to travel with his Arsenal team-mates to face Qarabag in the 2018-19 Europa League group stage. The return leg at the Emirates was interrupted by a pitch invader brandishing the Nagorno-Karabakh flag, with the Gunners fined €15,000 by UEFA as a result.

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May 12, 1993 is a date that remains branded on the history of Qarabag and the whole of Azerbaijan. Qarabag took to the pitch at the Imarat Stadium in Agdam to play Turan-Tovuz in the first leg of the Azerbaijan Cup semi-final. News reports guessed the attendance to be around 8,000, ready to get behind the Horsemen, as the club is known. The nickname is derived from both the Karabakh breed of horse and the two horses on the club's crest.

Qarabag won 1-0 thanks to a goal from Yashar Huseynov. It was to be the last match played at the Imarat Stadium.

"It was a great game," recalls striker Mushfiq Huseynov. "I remember the moment I got the ball and passed it to my brother who scored. I've never forgotten that moment. It was incredible. My pass and Yashar's goal. No one could have imagined that would be the last game we would play in our town."

"I'm sad and disappointed," remembers Yashar, "to think that was the last goal I had the chance to score at the Imarat, in Agdam."

Within a few weeks, the stadium had been destroyed in the conflict. Modern pictures of the stadium's ruins appear to simply show an empty field; there is barely any trace of the venue that saw one of the most important goals in Qarabag's history.

The club haven't played in Agdam since that day, instead forced into exile in the capital city of Baku. They have become known as "the club from the ghost town" or "the homeless team" for almost three decades.

More recently, they've also earned recognition for their consistent victories in the domestic league, and notable achievements in UEFA competitions.

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"Do more research!" said Qarabag coach Gurban Gurbanov to reporters when he was asked to tell them about his club on the eve of their Champions League meeting with Chelsea. Their journey from one of the lowest-ranked domestic leagues to the group stage of Europe's biggest club competition was the result of a serious and forward-looking plan by the new ownership that took over the club in 2001.

Until then, that 1993 title win was the only one in Qarabag's history; the Horsemen had generally hovered around mid-table, occasionally finishing in the top three, yet with no prospect of long-term success and, more importantly, fears for a very uncertain future.

The club was saved thanks to its acquisition by Azersun Holding, a food manufacturing company owned by Iranian brothers Abdolbari and Hassan Gozal.

Pitch invader...Arsenal's Europa League clash with Qarabag in 2018 is interrupted

Azerbaijan boss...Gianni De Biasi

In 2008, Gurban Gurbanov – Azerbaijan's all-time record goalscorer – was appointed head coach after the unexpected departure of Rasim Kara to Khazar Lankaran a week before the season started.

Under Gurbanov, Qarabag implemented a *tiki-taka* style of play, characterised by short passes, long periods of build-up and players interchanging their positions. He has stayed in charge ever since, helping the club achieve historic results in Europe and winning seven Azerbaijani Premier Leagues in a row starting in 2013-14.

> "I remember the moment I got the ball and passed it to my brother who scored...No one could have imagined that would be the last game we would play in our town"
>
> **Former Qarabag striker Mushfiq Huseynov**

Their winning streak was interrupted in 2020-21, when Neftci Baku pipped Qarabag to the title by two points. The victory re-established them as Azerbaijan's most successful club with nine titles, one ahead of the Horsemen.

In September 2020, the ceasefire was violated for the umpteenth time, in the latest escalation of the conflict. After six weeks of fighting Armenian forces, Azerbaijani took back control of the Agdam District.

Qarabag players, staff and management were finally able to visit their hometown after such a long absence, ending fears that they would never see it again.

★

In the current season, driven by the thrill of going home, Qarabag are dominating the league. For now they're still playing in Baku, with no stadium in Agdam. But there are projects to develop new infrastructures in the region and maybe they'll be able to play there again. "I visited Agdam in May, the ghost town, in a territory that was heavily mined during the conflict against Armenia," Gianni De Biasi, the Italian head coach of the Azerbaijan national team, tells *World Soccer*. "Thanks to a protected corridor, I was able to juggle with the ball among the ruins of what was the Imarat Stadium, together with my staff, Keisuke Honda [former Japan and Milan midfielder] and Elkhan Mammadov [vice president and general secretary of the Azerbaijani football federation].

"Qarabag are confirmation that in football, when there are ideas and a serious plan without impatience, at the end, the results arrive," continues De Biasi. "They have an important patrimony to support, with economic resources that give them the opportunity to take the best foreign players of the league.

"The fact that there's a coach like Gurbanov who's been in charge for such a long time means that there's big trust: and even if it happens that Qarabag lose the league on the last day, like last season, it doesn't matter because there's trust in the manager and in the players.

"For me as a national team coach, Qarabag is a strong point of reference, with about ten of their players regularly called up in my squad," adds the former Torino boss. "My captain and his deputy come from that club and they are really two important players for Azerbaijan."

The last words of the head coach are about the future: "For next season, Qarabag's goal will be to do even better than what they did this year in the Europa Conference League". They will also be dreaming of playing again in Agdam; a dream that has never been so concrete.

Long serving... Qarabag manager Gurban Gurbanov

eyewitness

Asif Burhan reports

SPAIN

A Nou record

Towards the end of a typically raucous Champions League night at the Nou Camp, a number was announced on the public address system which reverberated around the football world: 91,553, the record attendance figure for a match between two women's club sides.

This was not only a world record for the professional women's game, but the highest crowd figure at any football match played in Europe to that point this season. Moreover, it was a defining moment for the women's game.

The pre-match choreography, "More Than Empowerment", was unusually displayed several times by the fans during the match on a night to believe in the European women's club game as commercially viable, justifying the faith shown by UEFA, and their Head of Women's Football Nadine Kessler, in the re-branded Women's Champions League.

Record breaking ...the Nou Camp's giant scoreboard reveals the game's massive attendance

Photo credit: Asif Burhan

Future of Barca...Ona Baradad's record-breaking shirt on display in *La Masia*

Photo credit: Asif Burhan

Impressive ...*La Masia*

The morning after FC Barcelona Femeni thrashed Real Madrid 5-2 to win their quarter-final 8-3 on aggregate, every Spanish sports daily led with the record-breaking crowd figure. Catalan *Mundo Deportivo* devoted the first eight pages of its edition to analysing the match.

In fairness, there was a lot to pack in. In the first leg, favourites Barca were given a shock when they fell behind after just eight minutes. They equalised early in the second half before going on to score two more in the closing stages, but the reigning champions had given Madrid enough encouragement to suggest that the second leg was far from a foregone conclusion.

Indeed, when Real went 2-1 up on the night, closing the gap to 4-3 on aggregate, the record home crowd may well have been concerned. But four goals inside a 20-minute spell

Build-up...players line up ahead of the historic clash

Photo credit: UEFA

put the issue to bed, and Barca into the semi-finals.

A successful night in the club's attempts to retain their European crown then, setting up a semi-final clash with two-time champions Wolfsburg. Yet this was an event that was as much about the future as the present.

Sitting on the Barcelona bench throughout was a 17-year-old who promises to be a standard-bearer for the club, part of a generation that might ensure that such sell-out crowds at the Nou Camp become a regular occurrence in women's football.

Ona Baradad Rius did not make it onto the pitch that night, but earlier in the season she had made her Champions League debut against Hoffenheim, 7km west at the team's regular home stadium, Estadi Johan Cruyff.

That November night, Ona made history as the first-ever female resident of the club's fabled *La Masia* academy to play for the first team.

Established in 1979 as a residence in which to house the club's young players living outside Barcelona, the original *La Masia* (The Farmhouse) has long since been replaced by a state-of-the-art training facility, part of the Ciutat Esportiva Joan Gamper on the edge of the city. There, the club's young protégées of football, futsal, handball and basketball are trained, housed and schooled in the Barca philosophy. In the reception to the building stands a huge photo of its most famous graduates, Lionel Messi, Andres Iniesta and Xavi, who occupied the top three positions in the 2010 Ballon d'Or awards.

Female students at *La Masia* had only previously entered the building to have lunch or study. But last summer, female dormitories were opened for the first time

Female students at *La Masia* had only previously entered the building to have lunch or study. But last summer, female dormitories were opened for the first time. Nine players aged 16-18, including Ona, live on the third floor of the building, accessible only by facial recognition, in single rooms outside which their portrait is painted. From the window of their communal living area, they can see the Estadi Johan Cruyff, the home stadium for the women's team since 2019. Since Ona made her debut, her match-worn shirt has been displayed in *La Masia*'s Hall of Fame and the positive social media messages she received during the game are printed and displayed on the wall of the female living room as an inspiration for the others.

When *World Soccer* visits ahead of their record-breaking Champions League night against Real Madrid, Ona is having private tuition to catch up on the lessons she missed playing for the first team away in Madrid the previous weekend. Everything at *La Masia* is geared up to indoctrinating the young players in the "Barcelona Way", from the dinner trays emblazoned with Barca slogans to the pictures everywhere of the likes of Cruyff, Pep Guardiola and Messi.

Now central among the rows of framed photographs is one featuring the club's current Ballon d'Or winner and *World Soccer* Women's World Player of the Year, Alexia Putellas. The current captain of the side, the Catalan Putellas had to pursue opportunities at other clubs before returning to play for Barcelona aged 18.

According to the club's general manager of women's football, Markel Zubizarreta (son of former Barcelona goalkeeper, Andoni), Barca's current crop of world-beaters like Putellas have known only a professional environment since their late teens. The generation of players that will graduate from *La Masia*, he believes, will be even better, having benefitted from professional training and coaching since the age of ten.

The women who emerge from the academy in future will have gone through the five age-group teams now established by the club. In the last four

Photo credit: Asif Burhan

Super Alexia...a street art tribute to Barcelona superstar Alexia Putellas

years, the Under-10s, Under-12s and Under-14s have started to participate in boy's leagues – the only female teams in Spain competing against boys. Even if this means the girl's teams are not winning as many games as they may have done in a single-sex environment, the club believe the increased competitiveness will create a higher level of technically-skilled players further down the line.

Allowing female residents to stay on the facility will, for the first time, allow the most talented girls from outside the city become part of the club from a younger age. This creates an opportunity for Barcelona to recruit the best players from around the world and maybe one day bring through the next Lionel Messi, who was first plucked from Argentina to live in Barcelona at the age of 13. Among the male students currently resident at *La Masia*, it is estimated that half are Catalan, 40 per cent from the rest of Spain and ten per cent from abroad.

Of the nine female residents, only one, Mallorcan Lucia Corrales, is from outside Catalonia, and Zubizarreta insists the priority will always be on developing young players from the region: "When we started in 2015, the project was not to invest a lot of money and make the best signings in the world. We wanted to develop our own players and have a project that we feel proud of as a club, to invest in players in the academy."

He maintains that no other club in the world demands as much from its academy players. "I talk about football in a way that is completely different to what they have heard in the past. We are really proud of this. We need to try to keep this difference in the next few years. Everyone is investing in women's football. Now we are there, but if we stop right now, the clubs that are behind us maybe will reach our level.

"Of course, the philosophy of the club was to become champions of Europe – but in our way. I don't think it is better or worse than any other way, but it is our way and that is something that is really important."

What Barcelona have done better than other women's football teams is to convince their fans of their one-club philosophy. While many other leading teams around Europe have played showpiece matches at their main club stadium, none have so far managed to get them through the turnstiles as effectively as Barcelona.

While people may argue that the majority of the 91,553 attendance at the Nou Camp were club members offered the opportunity to claim up to four free tickets, getting them to turn up on a weekday for a game kicking off before the end of the Spanish working day was no mean achievement.

In the days leading up to the game, the club went on a public relations offensive, with club president Joan Laporta speaking on the radio urging all who had a ticket to attend or pass them on to someone who could. Full-page newspaper advertisements were run talking up the possibility of breaking the official FIFA world-record attendance figure of 90,185, which was set at the Pasadena Rose Bowl during the 1999 Women's World Cup final.

Photo credit: UEFA

Clincher...Putellas celebrates after netting Barca's fourth goal

Into the semis... Barca players celebrate with the supporters

It is worth pointing out that there are still "unofficial" records to be beaten. The final of the unofficial Women's World Cup in 1971, for example, was watched by at least 110,000 spectators in the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City.

Yet this was a huge moment for the modern women's game. Remarkably, the new record lasted less than a month before it was beaten again, at the same ground in the same competition, as 91,648 fans witnessed the 5-1 demolition of Wolfsburg in the home leg of the semi-finals.

This is in stark contrast to the English Women's Super League. Following a short-lived World Cup boom in 2019, crowd figures have struggled to re-establish themselves in a post-COVID season. Four days before the Spanish *Clasico* at the Nou Camp, Manchester United Women only attracted 20,241 for their first-ever match in front of an Old Trafford crowd, fewer than two women's games at the stadium a decade earlier during the London 2012 Olympics. Such were the disappointing crowd figures at two previous matches played at the 60,260-capacity Emirates Stadium, Arsenal Women only made 10,000 tickets available for their Champions League quarter-final against Wolfsburg, drawing in only 5,018 supporters.

In contrast, Zubizarreta insists that this loyalty to the women's team is embedded into the club's philosophy.

"Right now, we are not a project of women's football, we are a project of football," he explains. "At a club like Barcelona, this means our fan base is much bigger. There are a lot of people coming to our matches, not to see Barcelona's women's team but to see good football.

"If there is a Barca fan that puts on the television, they cannot recognise if it is men or women playing, they know it's a Barca team. The style of play comes from the style of training."

> "Right now, we are not a project of women's football, we are a project of football"
>
> **Markel Zubizarreta, Barcelona Femeni general manager**

Selfie...Barca star Aitana Bonmati takes a picture with home fans

JOT SHOT

Ignored by the academy scouts of Portugal's giants and cast aside by Atletico Madrid, Diogo Jota is continuing to prove his doubters wrong at Anfield

Words: Nick Bidwell

These are extraordinarily productive times for Diogo Jose Teixeira da Silva, aka Diogo Jota, the formidable Liverpool and Portugal frontrunner.

This season, everything the versatile 25-year-old attacker has touched has taken on a gilded hue, establishing himself as a vital component in Liverpool's attack, piling up the goals for the Reds – surpassing the 20-mark for the first time in his career – and becoming increasingly important for the Portuguese national team.

On signing for Liverpool in a £41 million deal from Wolverhampton Wanderers in September 2020, some mistakenly believed that he would only have a bit-part role in the Anfield squad, essentially recruited to provide emergency cover for the prodigious trio of Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino. However Jota has turned out to be much more than a rotation fix. Now clearly established as one of Jurgen Klopp's go-to guys in attack, he has developed into a true world-class operative; highly skilled, fast, imaginative, industrious and a ruthless finisher, while surprisingly adroit in the air.

No wonder he sports a smile as wide as the River Mersey. A devoted follower of the Premier League as a schoolboy, he is currently living the dream at Liverpool. "I would go to my grandfather's house at the weekend because he had the sports channel which showed English Premier League games," he recalled in a piece with the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* newspaper. "I'd watch the Saturday and Sunday matches and imagine being part of it one day."

While the vast majority of Portuguese internationals cut their teeth in the academies of Porto, Sporting or Benfica, Jota did not have this luxury. Unwanted by the Portuguese club establishment, young Diogo had to make do with a soccer education under the radar, spending nine years with Sport Club Gondomar, a second-tier outfit located some 15km southeast of Porto.

Diogo, born and brought up in the Massarelos district of Porto, the city's university quarter, first joined the Gondomar academy at the age of seven and proved an outstanding pupil. Mainly used as a left-sided or central midfielder or a playmaker, he was

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bright and lively, invariably made inroads when running with the ball and could finish with aplomb. One of his role models at the time was Benfica's magical Argentine number ten Pablo Aimar, a player whom the adolescent Lionel Messi famously adored.

Gondomar, a well-run club with good facilities, not only provided him with the technical ability and self-confidence to succeed; it was also there that he acquired his stage name – Diogo Jota. To mark himself out from all the other Diogos and Silvas at the club, he chose to go by the "Diogo J" moniker – "Jota" being the Portuguese pronunciation of the letter J.

His final tour of duty at Gondomar in 2012-13 was to be a firework display. As the season progressed, he was increasingly picked as a striker and scored for fun for both the Under-17s and U19s, netting no fewer than 39 goals in 37 games.

> "On the Saturday, he started and hit a hat-trick for the U19s, then came off the bench the following day to score twice for the U17s"
>
> **Ruben Carvalho, Jota's former youth coach**

"I remember a weekend that year when Diogo played on consecutive days for the U19s and U17s," Gondomar youth coach Ruben Carvalho told the *SAPO Desporto* website. "On the Saturday, he started and hit a hat-trick for the U19s, then came off the bench the following day to score twice for the U17s. As it happened, both games were against Candal and the same keeper was in the opposition goal – five goals in around 100 minutes!

"He'd score lots of goals from different positions. On the Sunday, he was playing just behind the main striker; on the Saturday, he was in midfield. It made no difference. He'd score just the same."

Despite the goals flying in left, right and centre, Diogo still had feelings of frustration. It rankled with him that he had never been asked to train with the Gondomar first team. Another source of dissatisfaction was his failure to land a deal with a top Portuguese club. Porto – whose ground was only five miles from his home in Massarelos – Braga and Benfica all showed a degree of interest in him, only to eventually back off. Their reasons? The time-honoured clichés of rejection: too frail, too small.

"At the age of 16, I was paying to play and playing to enjoy myself," Jota

Emerging talent... Jota in action for Pacos de Ferreira

Timeline

OCT 19, 2014
Makes his senior debut for Pacos de Ferreira, scoring in a 4-0 home win against Atletico de Reguengos in the Portuguese Cup.

MAY 17, 2015
Nets his first league goal for Pacos with a brace against Academica de Coimbra, becoming the youngest player to score for the club in the top flight.

NOV 17, 2015
Wins his first Portugal Under-21 cap in a European Championship qualifying victory over Israel while still only 18.

MAR 14, 2016
Signs an agreement to join Atletico Madrid that summer on a five-year deal.

AUG 26, 2016
Returns to Portugal for a one-year loan spell at Porto.

DEC 7, 2016
Scores his first Champions League goal in Porto's 5-0 victory over Leicester City in the 2016-17 group stage.

JUL 25, 2017
Agrees a one-year loan to English Championship club Wolverhampton Wanderers on a season-long loan.

told the *O Jogo* sports daily in 2020. "I did train at a number of big clubs, though nothing came of it. I was disappointed, but it all turned out OK in the end. The secret is not to give up."

This all-powerful desire and unshakeable self-belief has served as his personal suit of armour. Whenever obstacles block his path, he shrugs, takes it in his stride and redoubles his efforts. He is a stoical character, instinctively inclined to keep matters in perspective.

Such was the case when a move from the Pacos de Ferreira club to Atletico Madrid swiftly turned sour in the summer of 2016. A €7m recruit with a five-year contract in his back pocket, Jota would have been chomping at the bit to make his mark with the "*Colchoneros*". Yet sadly he never had the chance to perform in La Liga, sent on a season-long loan to Porto within weeks of arriving in the Spanish capital.

Many have wondered why Atletico bought him in the first place, especially given their determination to see off Portuguese giants Benfica in a bidding war. A possible explanation is the "too much of a good thing" theory, with Atletico belatedly realising that two of their recruits that summer (Diogo and the former Benfica man Nicolas Gaitan) were too similar in style. The town was not big enough for both.

Nor was it a walk in the park during his early days as a full Portuguese international. Winning his first cap in November 2019 in a European Championship qualifier versus Lithuania, he only made three starts in his opening ten games for his country and it did seem on occasion that national coach Fernando Santos had his reservations. Santos was heavily criticised in the local media for leaving Jota out of a Nations League defeat to France in November 2020. Coincidentally or not, Diogo has been an automatic pick ever since.

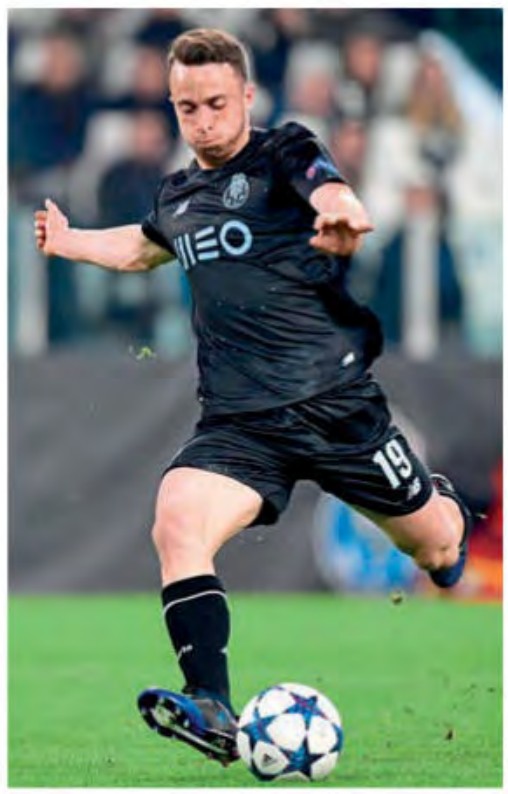
Jota's level-headed ability to roll with the punches has much to do with his upbringing. His parents, father Joaquin and mother Isabel, both factory workers, did not have piles of spare cash to lavish on Diogo and his younger brother Andre – who now plays in midfield for Gondomar – but what they could pass on was bags of humility, unselfishness and realism.

"He could see the difficulties we had as parents," said his father in an interview with *Maisfutebol*. "We didn't earn much above the minimum wage. It was not easy to have two children in football and get paid what we did. Diogo never asked us for anything. He never even said that he wanted a pair of branded football boots. He knew it wasn't possible.

"He never went out at night, even as a teenager. He was always at home. For Diogo, if there was football in the afternoon and PlayStation at night, he was happy."

In the summer of 2013, he was finally granted his dream move to the Portuguese top flight, swapping Gondomar for Pacos de Ferreira, another city in Greater Porto. Gilberto Andrade, then Pacos head of youth development, was the man who facilitated the transfer. Andrade could not believe that no elite Portuguese club had come in for the youngster. He vowed to promptly back his judgement.

"Gondomar and Pacos de Ferreira were facing off in a youth game and Jota was making a big difference," Andrade explained to the *Diario de Noticias* newspaper. "I went to speak



Loan spells... lining up a shot against Juventus for Porto

Head master...Jota nets for Portugal against Turkey in the 2022 World Cup qualifying play-offs

AUG 15, 2017
Scores his first goal in England to help seal a 3–2 away win against Hull City.

JAN 30, 2018
Agrees a deal to join Wolves permanently that summer for a fee of €14m.

JAN 19, 2019
Becomes only the second Portuguese player – after Cristiano Ronaldo – to net a Premier League hat-trick in a 4-3 victory over Leicester City.

JUN 9, 2019
Watches from the bench as Portugal win the inaugural UEFA Nations League with a 1-0 win over the Netherlands in the final.

NOV 14, 2019
Makes his Portugal debut in a Euro 2020 qualifier against Lithuania, replacing Cristiano Ronaldo in the 84th minute.

DEC 12, 2019
Completes a 12-minute hat-trick after coming on in the second half of a Europa League game against Besiktas.

Promotion party... Wolves' Portuguese players celebrate reaching the Premier League in 2018

to our president and insisted that we sign him. He began talks with his Gondomar counterpart during the game itself and they cobbled together an agreement. Jota was a wild horse, an innate talent."

Jota, who spent his first season at Pacos de Ferreira in the youth team, initially found the going tough. "He was used to being the star of the show at Gondomar and training with less intensity so he could play for two different teams at the weekend," explained Andrade. "He discovered a more competitive environment with us and took a while to adapt."

The following season (2014-15) would prove much more fruitful, with Pacos de Ferreira coach Paulo Fonseca – later to take charge of Porto, Braga, Shakhtar Donetsk and Roma – deeming him ready for the first team. In October 2014, he marked his first senior appearance with a goal in a Portuguese Cup tie against Atletico Reguengos and some four months later, made his top-flight debut in a 2-2 draw with Vitoria Guimaraes. Towards the end of that campaign the teenager – usually deployed centrally as a striker or number ten – opened his league goalscoring account, netting a brace in a 3-2 win over Academica Coimbra to become Pacos's youngest-ever goalscorer in the Portuguese top-flight at the time (aged 18 years and six months).

> "Diogo Jota can be the new Cristiano Ronaldo"
> **Jorge Simao, former Pacos de Ferreira manager**

New-look Liverpool attack...Jota has linked up well with Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane

With the aperitif and starter swallowed, he could now turn his attention to the main course – establishing himself as a genuine Primeira Liga revelation. And what a good job he made of it in 2015-16, scoring 12 goals and making six assists and forever catching the eye with his left-wing incisiveness and brilliant breaks inside.

After his short-lived hiatus at Atletico, a return to his home city to wear the blue-and-white stripes of Porto was just what the doctor ordered. Now part of an excellent front two alongside Andre Silva – these days with RB Leipzig – Jota celebrated his first start for the Dragons with a fine hat-trick in a 4-0 domestic league victory at Nacional and several other highlights would follow, including a goal in a "*Classico*" draw against Benfica and his first-ever Champions League strike in a 5-0 rout of Leicester City.

A compelling combination of finishing power, craft and high energy, he could not have wished for a better first season at the Estadio do Dragao. Once upon a time, Porto talent-spotters would not have recognised him in a police line-up. All of a sudden, people were sitting up and taking notice. "Diogo Jota can be the new Cristiano Ronaldo," declared former Pacos de Ferreira boss Jorge Simao in the autumn of 2016. "I'm not afraid to say it. It could happen. He has the potential."

When Jota opted in the 2017 off-season to accept a loan deal with drifting English second-tier side Wolves, a large proportion of Portuguese pundits thought he had taken leave of his senses. Indeed, even his uncle openly questioned the decision. But Diogo felt inextricably drawn to the project at the Black Country club. His agent Jorge Mendes was calling the recruitment shots there, the ambition was palpable and last but by no means least, he would

SEP 5, 2020
Scores his first senior international goal in a 4-1 win over Croatia in the Nations League.

SEP 19, 2020
Joins Liverpool for £41m, a record sale for Wolves, before scoring on his league debut for the club nine days later in a 3-1 win against Arsenal.

NOV 3, 2020
Scores a hat-trick in a 5-0 win over Atalanta to become the first Liverpool player since Robbie Fowler to score seven goals in his first ten games.

DEC 9, 2020
Suffers a leg injury during a Champions League match against Midtjylland, ruling him out until March.

JUN 19, 2021
Scores in Portugal's group stage defeat to Germany at Euro 2020, his second of four appearances at the finals including Portugal's last-16 defeat to Belgium.

FEB 27, 2022
Scores from the penalty spot in Liverpool's shootout victory over Chelsea in the League Cup final, his first trophy at the club.

have the opportunity to work with his old Porto boss Nuno Espirito Santo.

It turned out to be an inspired choice of career path. In his first season at Molineux (2017-18), he contributed 17 goals as Wolves ran away with the Championship title. The following campaign, he managed a decent nine goals and five assists in the Premier League – the highlight being a hat-trick in a 4-3 win over Leicester City – and journeyed even further into the stratosphere in 2019-20, scoring 16 times in all competitions, including nine goals in the Europa League. All in all, three years of outstanding work for Wolves. Next stop Liverpool, where his star has continued to inexorably rise.

Nuno Espirito Santo, his former boss at Wolves, has a straightforward explanation for Jota's emergence as a forward of genuine top-drawer pedigree: "Diogo loves the game, is committed and lives for football." And so he should when he plays so splendidly.

Derby delight...Jota celebrates scoring against Everton

Diogo Jota

the numbers game

PORTUGAL

24

CAPS

GOALS

9

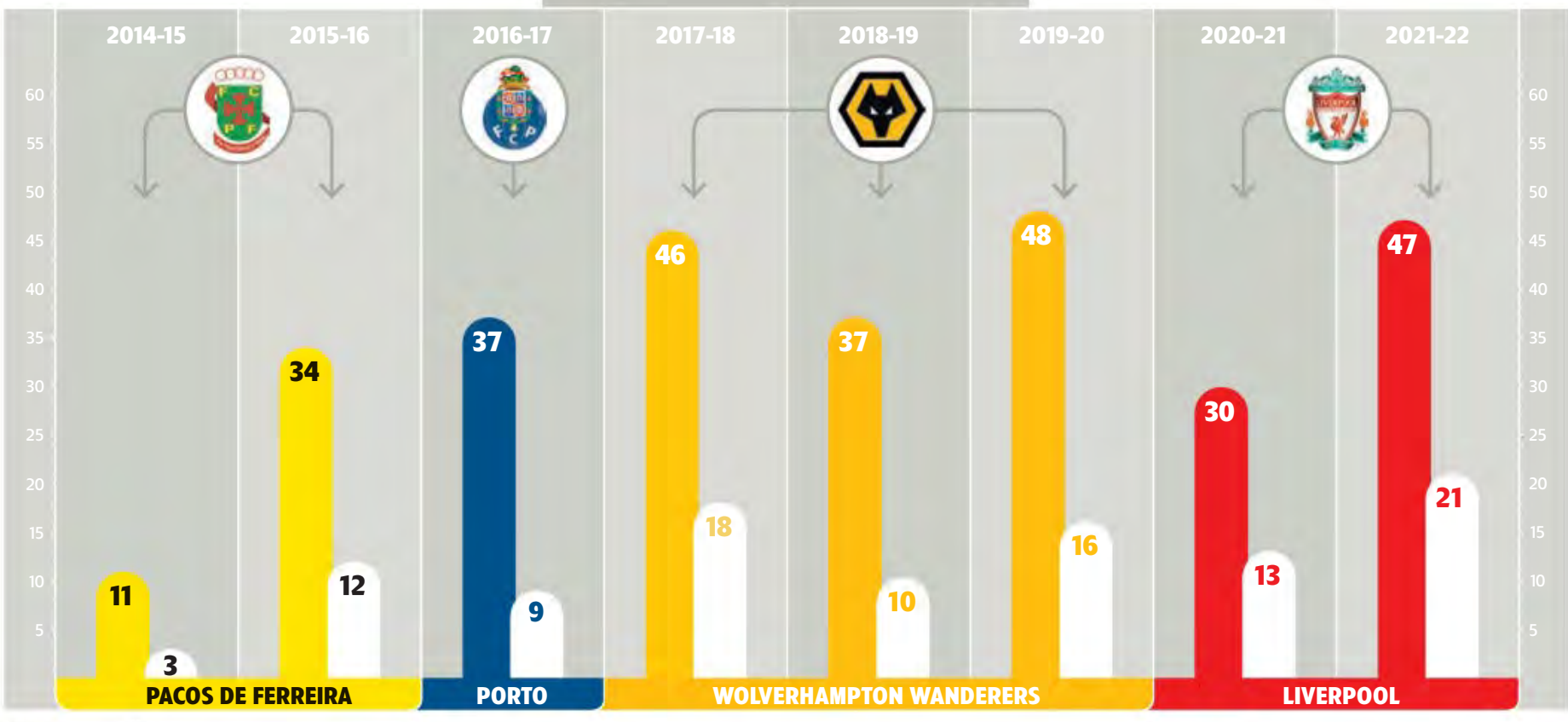
LIVERPOOL'S RECORD SIGNINGS

£75m	**VIRGIL VAN DIJK** 2018 (from Southampton)
£67m	**ALISSON** 2018 (from Roma)
£52.75m	**NABY KEITA** 2018 (from RB Leipzig)
£41m	**DIOGO JOTA** 2020 (from Wolves)
£39m	**FABINHO** 2018 (from Monaco)

PORTUGAL UNDER-21 TOP SCORERS

Player	Goals
Hugo Almeida	13
Goncalo Ramos	11
Fabio Vieira	11
Diogo Jota	8
Diogo Goncalves	8
Rui Fonte	8

HONOURS



GAMES GOALS *(Up to and inc. 29.04.22)*

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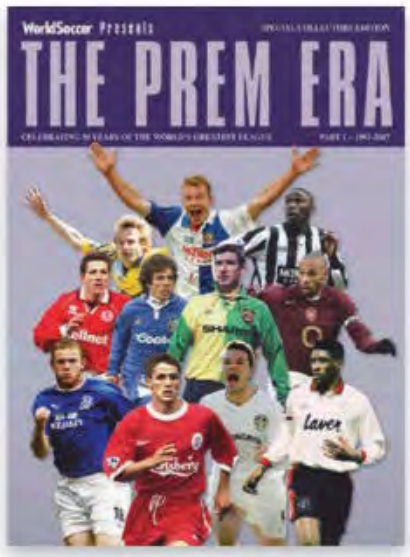

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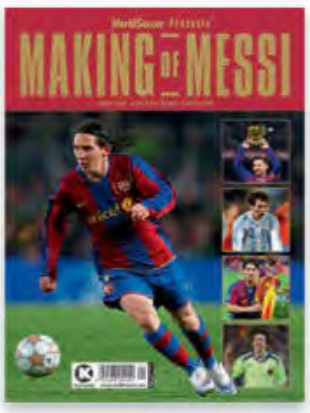

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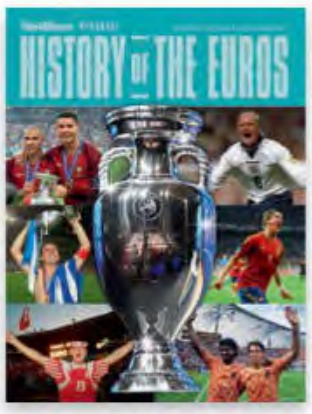

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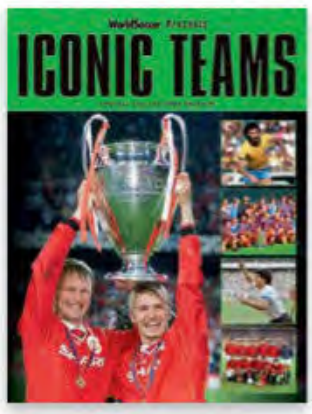

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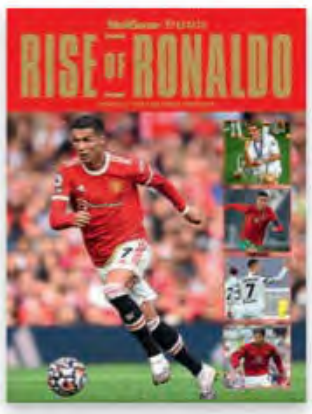

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TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

UEFA YOUTH LEAGUE STARS

Words Nick Bidwell

Ange CHIBOZO

Juventus

In a sentence
Dynamic 18-year-old Juventus youth team sharpshooter, already a full senior international for the West African nation of Benin and who has recruitment agents from all over Europe beating a path to his door.

What they say
"He's a player of outstanding quality, someone with the capacity to take a leading role in a team"
Andrea Bonatti, Juventus youth team coach

"He is doing very well in the youth ranks of one of Europe's biggest clubs and has a great deal of potential. We've been following and talking about him a lot. He represents the future of Benin football"
Michel Dussuyer, head coach of Benin

The story so far
Angel Josue Chibozo – to give him his full name – learned the rudiments of the game as a schoolboy at the Codjia Nedville Football School in Ouidah, a coastal city in southern Benin. Moved to Italy at the age of 11 to live with his mother, who had separated from his father and emigrated to Europe, and duly caught the eye of academy bosses at Internazionale. As a non-EU minor, he frequently fell foul of Italian bureaucracy, yet still managed to perform excellently for *Nerazzurri* in a string of junior tournaments.

In early 2017 (aged 13) he moved to Lombardy lower league club Giana Erminio, where he was regularly on the scoresheet for the Under-15s. Snapped up by Juventus the following summer, going on to earn rave reviews for his work with the *Bianconeri* U16 and U17 teams. He was only 16 when he graduated to the Juve youth team in October 2019. In 2019-20 he racked up 15 goals in 17 games for the U17s and has been in prime goalscoring and creative form this term for Young Juve, notching four UEFA Youth League goals, including one each in the quarter-final win against Liverpool and the penalty shootout defeat to eventual winners Benfica in the semi-final.

Initially nurtured as a second striker by Juventus, but these days can equally be a threat as the main striker or on the left wing. Recently won his first cap for Benin as a second-half substitute in a 2-1 victory over Zambia.

The next step
The Juventus plan is for him to round off his football education with a spell in the U23 side and a first-team loan spell somewhere in Italy. In a perfect world, the *Bianconeri* would, as a matter of urgency, have him put pen to paper on his first pro contract; a number of interested parties, both within and beyond the Italian borders, will have noted that his current apprenticeship deal only has 12 months to run. The all-important question is the verdict of the Juve management. This is not a club with a strong track record in promoting homegrown talent. His agent Mathieu Gomes wisely is keeping all options open: "We're aiming high without limits."

Strengths
His spiky will-to-win, boundless energy, physicality and versatility, alongside the ability to operate anywhere along the front-line. Probably at his best cutting in from the left. Explosive in his movement, a gifted dribbler and a very cool finisher. His right-foot is a missile-launcher.

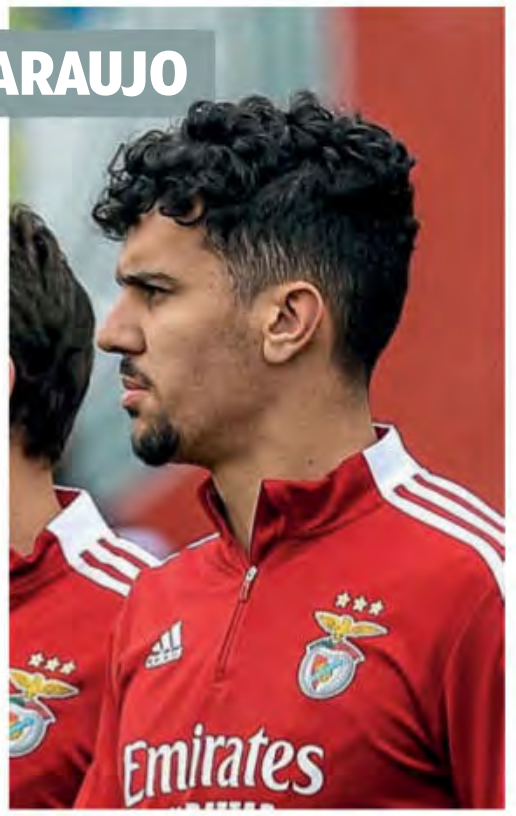
Weaknesses
Doesn't have the best of injury records. In terms of tactics and teamwork, a work in progress. Needs to be more confident when chances fall on his left foot.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT CHIBOZO

- As a boy, his favourite player was the Brazil and Barcelona star Ronaldinho.
- First made a name for himself while playing a huge part in Internazionale's victory in the prestigious Abano Terme Under-13 tournament in 2016, shining against Ajax and Bayer Leverkusen.
- He has already trained with the Juventus first team. In his first-ever pro session, he had the cheek to nutmeg Juve's Turkish international defender Merih Demiral.

> "He represents the future of Benin football"
> Michel Dussuyer, head coach of Benin

Tomas ARAUJO



Benfica
Dominant centre-back blessed with excellent aerial ability, positional awareness, powers of recovery and comfort on the ball. Expertly calls the back-line shots for Young Benfica, a none-too-easy task in a defensive unit that plays such a high line. Has played for Portugal at all levels from U15 to U20, often as the latter's skipper.

Javier CURRAS

Atletico Madrid
Graduates of the Atleti youth ranks can rest assured that the club will not ignore them. This season, Diego Simeone called up no fewer than 14 ex-academy pupils, and attacking midfielder Curras could soon be one of that happy band. Sumptuous ball skills, lashings of invention, difficult to dispossess and a proven scorer, he is especially menacing from direct free-kicks.

Bradley FINK

B. Dortmund
Now in his third season with BVB following a move from Swiss club Luzern, the teenage striker has been amassing goals by the crateful. Could the Swiss U19 ace be the "new Erling Haaland"? On the basis of his towering presence, intense competitiveness and hunger for goals, the comparison makes sense.

Oscar FRAULO

Midtjylland
Versatile young midfielder capable of bringing poise, vision, industry and intelligence to any engine room slot: enforcer, playmaker (deep-lying or advanced) or in box-to-box-mode. Of southern Italian lineage, the teenager is certainly not bereft of leadership qualities either, often captaining the Midtjylland U19s. A current Denmark U19 international.

MARVEL

Real Madrid
Outstanding Morocco-born stopper currently featuring for Spain's U19s. A robust force of nature, determined, quick and technically very proficient. Extremely marketable: good quality left-footed centre-backs are in short-supply these days. Raul, the boss of Real's reserves, is a fan, so was ex-coach Zinedine Zidane, who allowed him to train with the seniors on occasion.

Tyler MORTON

Liverpool
Impressive midfield all-rounder, who has made astonishing progress in recent times. For various Liverpool academy sides, he has tended to sparkle as a technically-accomplished playmaker. But on breaking into Jurgen Klopp's first team, he showed another side to his game – that of the busy, aggressive defensive midfielder, as displayed in the 2-2 draw with Spurs in December. Joined the Reds aged seven.

Ruslan NESHCHERET

Dynamo Kyiv
Amazingly the Ukraine U21 keeper has now appeared in three of the last four UEFA Youth League campaigns, looking the part in every one with his agility, strong hands, composure, speed off his line and sweeper-keeper ability. In 2020-21, when Dynamo didn't take part in the competition, he made his Champions League debut instead, filling in brilliantly for No.1 Georgiy Bushchan in a 2-1 defeat to Barcelona.

Xavi SIMONS

Paris Saint-Germain
The talented teenage Dutchman, an attacking midfielder with wonderful close control, a fine range of pass and an innate ability to find space between the lines, has made a few cameo appearances for the PSG first team this season. But will he stay on at the Parc des Princes? The Netherlands U19 international's contract is about to expire and he may choose to look elsewhere for more playing time.

DENNIS THE MENACE

Emmanuel Dennis has enjoyed a renaissance at Watford after struggling to shrug off the "bad boy" tag he earned in Belgium and Germany

Words: Oluwashina Okeleji

For much of the 2021-22 season, Watford's fate has seemed set in stone.

The Hornets have spent much of the campaign inside the relegation zone, fighting the same current that dragged them down to the Championship just two years ago. It is a battle that has claimed two different managers and brought a third out of prospective retirement; nevertheless, it seems increasingly like a losing one.

The one shred of comfort in the bleakness has come in the form of Nigeria international Emmanuel Dennis.

The 24-year-old joined Watford last summer from Belgian side Club Brugge, following a disappointing loan spell in the German Bundesliga with Cologne, for a modest €4 million fee.

Fair to say, then, that expectations were not overly high.

Yet Dennis has been a revelation. In November he became only the sixth player in Premier League history to notch at least five goals and five assists within his first 12 matches. By the middle of April he had scored or assisted 15 goals – half of Watford's total attacking output at the time.

For English fans, it has been quite the introduction, both in terms of impact and the speed of adaptation. Interestingly though, Dennis has gone about his integration rather counter-intuitively: by refusing to immerse himself in the social life of Hertfordshire.

"After training every day I just come home with my friends. Sometimes we go for a walk, sometimes we just play games: we try to go bowling, just to keep ourselves busy," he tells *World Soccer*. "As a person, I'm a little bit boring. I just stay home, watch movies and play games. I hardly go out; I don't really fancy it that much. I can go out maybe once or twice a month. Most of the time, I have someone that cooks for me."

From this, a portrait begins to emerge: that of a retiring, aloof character with a small circle and an aversion to the limelight. Repeatedly, he stresses he is "not a guy that gives interviews", and he even says he is perfectly fine letting people make up their own minds about him.

However, over the course of his career, this natural aloofness has come to be mistaken for arrogance. He has also acquired a "bad boy" tag, mostly on account of an unfortunate bus incident that took place at previous club Brugge.

Until that point, things had been going well for the Adamawa-born forward. His introduction to Europe was a one-year stint in Ukraine with Zorya Luhansk in 2016, which, while difficult, left him with good memories.

"The weather was cold," Dennis recalls. "But, other than that, there were nice guys in the team. The coach [Yuriy Vernydub] was the same coach that beat Real Madrid in the Bernabeu with FC Sheriff. He was my first coach, and he was a really nice person. He really liked me. He said I was hard working, so he gave me the opportunity I needed. Those couple of months I played, I scored a couple of goals. He gave me confidence and helped me a lot. And then I went to Club Brugge."

In his maiden season in Belgium, he helped the club win the league title, scoring seven goals. However, it was while playing for the erstwhile Belgian champions in the Champions League in 2019 that Dennis first made international headlines.

During an away game against Real Madrid in October of that year, he hit a brace in a 2-2 draw. Beyond contributing to a famous result for Club Brugge though, it was his reaction that most captured the imagination, pulling out an imitation of Cristiano Ronaldo's famous "*Siu*" celebration in front of the same Santiago Bernabeu crowd that had cheered the Portuguese hero for close to a decade before his departure the year before.

As it happens, it was an offhand discussion with fellow Nigeria forward Victor Osimhen that prompted the decision to celebrate in that fashion.

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WATFORD

Osimhen had apparently told him it would "bust heads." By the time the game was over, Emmanuel Dennis had become a household name.

"It was a crazy night for me," he recalls. "Oh, my days! My phone? Oh my God! My phone that night, I swear, I had almost 50,000 messages. I was getting goose bumps. That night was one of the best nights [of my life]."

In that moment, it seemed like he could do no wrong. Then came interest from several clubs, most notably in the Premier League where the likes of Arsenal and Manchester United were linked with Dennis.

However, Club Brugge were not minded to allow their new superstar to leave without extracting maximum value, and interested buyers baulked at the quoted fee. It was against this backdrop of disillusionment at the stalling of his career prospects that the forward, upon finding his seat on the team bus taken, refused to board ahead of a Champions League match with Borussia Dortmund.

A loan transfer to German side Cologne was supposed to provide something of a fresh start, but it was a bad move for all parties. Erstwhile Billy Goats sporting director Horst Heldt called it a "bad transfer", Dennis struggled with mental health issues and Brugge lost value on a prized asset and were ultimately forced to sell in a cut-price deal.

Aware of the reputation the end of his time in Belgium has earned him, Dennis has been deliberate about keeping an even lower profile and avoiding confrontation since joining Watford, instead letting his football do the talking.

"People say: 'Ah yeah, we know him. He's a stubborn guy. He's arrogant. He had problems in Club Brugge, he had problems in Germany.' Yeah. I had problems in Brugge, in Germany – you don't want me to have problems in England as well. That's why I'm respecting everything, [so as] not to have more problems," he admitted.

It is a decision that has already come at a high cost: while he has stayed out of trouble in England, his unavailability for the Africa Cup of Nations in January set tongues wagging and called his commitment to the national team into question.

After a tense back-and-forth with Watford over releasing the player, the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) accused the club of "baring fangs" and elected to leave him out of the squad.

Dennis, however, tells it very differently. "Let me just make it clear for everyone. I've always come to the national team whenever they invite me. I mean, it's Nigeria, it's the national team, it's the Super Eagles – that's every child's dream, to play for the Super Eagles. No one's going to say no to representing his country. Impossible.

"They [the NFF] sent a letter. The letter didn't arrive at the normal time, so the club said: 'Look, we're not going to let you go because they didn't respect the rules, the letter didn't

Prolific season... Dennis celebrates one of his Premier League goals

Bundesliga stint... Dennis vies for the ball with Bayern's Alphonso Davies

come in time.' And then I said: 'Look, I want to go but I don't want to make problems. I'm known for making problems, so I don't want to make another problem.'

"Because, you see on Twitter, a lot of Nigerians were like: 'He's arrogant, he has too much ego.' Some of them come and point out: 'He had problems at Club Brugge. He had problems in Germany.' These are the people that I want to fight my team to come play for, and they were already mocking me on social media. I didn't want to have problems again in England, so I just respected what the club said.

"The letter did not come at the right time, but the club could not really stop me because it was a FIFA period. So, the whole time I was speaking to the coach, [Augustine] Eguavoen. I asked him: 'Can you push the NFF people?' My club don't have the right to say no when it's the right time, when it's the FIFA [window]. If the club has the power to say no, it means that there's something that is wrong, you see?"

It is evidently an episode that still agitates the forward, and he is determined to set the record straight.

"I was also a little bit injured, to be honest. I missed, I think, at least two games. So, I went to Belgium to meet my doctor. I was there for like a week. I can show you proof on my phone. I'll show you, and then you will see the dates. I was injured. I had to go to Belgium to have treatment with my doctor. You can see the date. This was like January 4." At this point in the interview, Dennis takes out his phone to reveal photos of his treatment in Belgium. "I was not in England. I was injured. I travelled.

"But then, it was a perfect moment for all the Nigerian bloggers to make a story."

An interview with the Watford media team also aired around that time, in which Dennis seemed to suggest the national team was not on his mind. This gave further credence to the notion he was not overly bothered about playing for Nigeria, and so fuelled a barrage of news articles and hot takes on social media.

The entire episode, and the coverage of it, is an obvious point of annoyance for Dennis. "You see, Nigerian bloggers – some of them – they don't know anything. That [video] was not the full story. The guy didn't post the full video.

"I did an interview with the club, in Watford, and the guy asked me about [my] form: 'You're playing good, the national team – is it something in your head, like you're thinking about it?' You cannot be in the club thinking about your national team, just like I cannot be in the national team thinking about a game in Watford. No! I have to think about the game here first.

"He asked me, and then I said something like: 'It's not in my head, but obviously if they call me I'll go, of course. If they don't call me, I'm not going to do anything.' That's what I said. But the guy didn't post the whole video. He just edited the video and posted only when I said: 'No, it's not in my mind.'

"Things like this, they don't bother me. I don't care. Things don't get to me. I don't know why these things affect people. Maybe because I grew up in a barracks, so the orientation is different. I've always been like this: I don't care about these hate messages and stuff. But I'm just saying this just to clarify to the people that have been deceived about me. That's the reason I'm speaking about this situation.

"One thing I'll tell people is this: you don't know people. You don't know any football player. You only know what's been said about them in the paper, or in the news. And these things make people think that they know the football player. But you're deceiving yourself."

Dennis' strong desire to play for Nigeria at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was extinguished after an away goals play-off defeat to bitter rivals Ghana at the end of March.

Disappointed and broken to see the dream of a first appearance on the global stage fade away, he has quickly switched his attention to the 2023 AFCON in Ivory Coast.

"It was really sad to lose the World Cup ticket. It wasn't our day and it really affected me because we wanted to give so much to our country and fans," he added.

"The Nations Cup next year is an opportunity for us to atone for this. We need to first qualify and try to give our fans something to cheer about."

> "I've always come to the national team whenever they invite me...that's every child's dream, to play for the Super Eagles. No one's going to say no to representing his country. Impossible"

Headline maker... Dennis scoring his second goal at the Bernabeu in 2019

Success story...
Brenden Aaronson
(Credit: redbullsalzburg.at)

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE MEDFORD MESSI

Brenden Aaronson has wasted no time in making a big impression at Red Bull Salzburg

Words: Adrian Back

When Brenden Aaronson joined Red Bull Salzburg in January 2021, the versatile attacking midfielder could have been forgiven for taking some time to adjust to life in Austria. With little more than 50 appearances in Major League Soccer to his name, it seemed unlikely that he would immediately adapt to the standard of the league and the huge demands placed on attacking players at the Austrian champions.

Under Jesse Marsch, Salzburg players were expected to play high-tempo football with the ball and undertake aggressive pressing without it. The belief was that Aaronson would adjust gradually, as hitting the ground running would be a serious challenge for a player who had only been a regular starter for Philadelphia Union for a couple of seasons.

That school of thought quickly dissipated, as Aaronson became a crucial member of the Salzburg team, making 25 appearances in all competitions – scoring seven and assisting five – as he helped his side land a domestic double. This season the 21-year-old has played an even more instrumental role, earning plaudits for his performances both domestically and in European competition as Salzburg reached the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Having first excelled under Marsch – who is reportedly keen on bringing Aaronson to Leeds United this summer – the young American is now starring for highly-rated young coach Matthias Jaissle. His versatility, with the ability to play across the front-line or at the head of a midfield diamond, has helped him carve out a reputation as one of the most exciting and promising talents in Austria.

But how has Aaronson made the move look quite so effortless? "When I first arrived I immediately felt like part of the family of the club. From the first week I just felt like all the players and staff had taken me in and I felt right at home," he says. "That was a big reason why I hit the ground running.

"The standard of the league is different from MLS in that it's more high-tempo and a lot more physical. Teams come out and press and are aggressive, which doesn't make it easy. But I love the Red Bull style: the pressing, the open counter-attacks; that's something I really enjoy. It's an attacking way of football and I wouldn't want to play any other way. I love being able to get the ball and play that final pass or drive forward. It fits me."

It's not just Aaronson's ability to run at players and find a key pass that has caught the eye. It's also his willingness to close down the opposition and his understanding of when to press. This has been pivotal to Salzburg's continued success as they look to once again win the Austrian Bundesliga.

His creativity and work rate was also on display in the Champions League as he helped them progress out of a tough group that contained Sevilla, Wolfsburg and Lille. He then provided an assist as Salzburg earned a 1-1 home draw with German giants Bayern Munich in the last 16, and was again a provider during the hugely disappointing return leg at the Allianz Arena as Bayern secured a thumping 7-1 victory.

Despite that heavy defeat, Aaronson was delighted with the club's, and his own, performances in the Champions League. "We gained so much confidence from the group stage as no matter who we faced, we played our style and had that mentality of fighting and giving it everything. We have so many young guys who are just fearless and want to take it to teams. That's a big part of our success," he explains.

"Even against Bayern, in the first leg we had chances to go 2-0 up, which would have been massive for the second leg. When it's open, we're brave and have confidence. We want to take the game to every team. And while the second leg was tough to take, and I don't think we deserved to go out like that, I'm proud of the way we performed.

"For me personally, it was a dream come true as I had dreamt of playing in the Champions League my entire life. It was an unbelievable first season in the competition and hopefully there are many more to come. I was really proud of how I handled things and that's the level I want to play at."

Aaronson also feels as though his own game is still developing, with the American putting in plenty of time on the training pitch, spending his free time watching other players that he admires and setting himself new targets.

"I feel like my game is evolving. Going from Jesse to Matthias, it's two different roles but I feel like I've been able to adapt and learn in both positions. This year the final ball I've been playing has been really good and that's down to a lot of work in training. But I can always get better," he says.

"On the wall in my house that I look at every single day, I have goals that I set. I want ten goals and ten assists before the end of the season. It's doable and I'll continue to work towards that. When you are looking at it every single day you are always reminding yourself to keep pushing, as you can always do better.

Qatar-bound... Aaronson celebrates USA's goal against Jamaica in World Cup qualifying

"You can't feel like you've already made it, you have to stay hungry. My dad has been a big part of my development and I watch a lot of football videos, to see how I can better myself. I'm a football addict so I watch football all the time. Even as a young kid I would wake up at 7am to watch the Premier League. I would love to watch Liverpool as I'm a big supporter and have been my entire life, so waking up and watching games was basically my childhood.

"Now I watch lots of European football. I was watching Manchester City recently and saw how Phil Foden could play on the left wing, as a striker and a central midfielder. You have to be so versatile now and that's something I've always been able to do. So I'm constantly learning with every game I play."

Aaronson's excellent form at Salzburg has also seen him force his way into the US national team. Having scored in three emphatic friendly victories at the end of 2020 and in 2021, he's been an integral part of the side that booked their place at the 2022 World Cup. He scored in the 1-1 home draw with Canada and then in the 4-1 away win over Honduras.

"The team that we have is really awesome and very close-knit. We've done very well in qualifying but I think we can still do better," believes Aaronson. "CONCACAF is an underrated region to play in as conditions can be really rough. It's almost always very hot and the pitches might not be the best. So it's about fighting, as you might not be able to play your style.

"But the way we are going I think we have a bright future and I'm really excited to see how far we can go. The pressure is on as we're such a big country, and a lot of people are starting to take an interest in football now, which brings some added pressure. But I think everyone is ready for this moment."

> "I don't want to compare myself with **anybody,** but I have been a Messi fan my whole **life so** it's a pretty cool nickname"

In Qatar, Aaronson will be vying with the likes of Chelsea's Christian Pulisic, Borussia Dortmund's Giovanni Reyna, Valencia's Yunus Musah and Lille's Timothy Weah for a place in the starting XI – highlighting the young talent that America is producing.

And just like these players, Aaronson believes that he has the quality to play in one of Europe's top leagues. "For me, the goal is to play at the very highest level and to play in one of the top five leagues. That will hopefully be my next step.

"But for now, I am focused on winning trophies with Red Bull Salzburg."

Hitting the ground running...Aaronson celebrates after scoring against AC Wolfsberger *(Credit: redbullsalzburg.at)*

As a player who likes to set targets, there is one lofty ambition that Aaronson would ultimately love to achieve, and it all stems from the tongue-in-cheek nickname he was given when playing in MLS. Having been born and raised in Medford, New Jersey, Philadelphia fans started to refer to the young star as the "Medford Messi".

"If there's one player you want to be compared with it's the best player in the world," Aaronson says with a broad smile on his face. "I don't want to compare myself with anybody, but I have been a Messi fan my whole life so it's a pretty cool nickname. I hope that one day young players are compared to me, because I want to be that top player. So I will keep working as hard as I can to be the best possible player I can be."

Wonderkid watch...Aaronson completes with Bayern youngster Jamal Musiala in the Champions League

HOT PROPE

Cody Gakpo is a name that is set to be on the lips of scouts, agents and managers all over Europe this summer. The 22-year-old recently sat down with *World Soccer* to discuss his breakout season

Words: Harry De Cosemo

Cody Gakpo is shutting out the noise. As his breakout season on the European stage draws to a close, he has had more eyes on him than ever, but he is keeping his feet firmly on the ground. The 22-year-old Netherlands winger is thriving as vice-captain of his hometown club, PSV, wearing the armband and scoring the winner in his side's 2-1 victory over Ajax in the Dutch Cup final in April.

"We've had a good season," Gakpo tells *World Soccer* exclusively. "If you compare it to last season, we've had a great season. We had some injuries and were 16 points behind Ajax, so I'm really proud of the team."

Prominent among the list of injured PSV players this season has been midfielder and first-choice skipper Marco van Ginkel, meaning that Gakpo has often been the team's leader; an impressive feat and burden of responsibility for one so young.

It has, without doubt, increased an already bright spotlight on him. Gakpo has led PSV's scoring charts for most of the season, with double figures for assists taking him beyond 20 goal involvements in the Eredivisie by the start of April. With a further seven strikes in Europe, plus a couple in the Dutch Cup, he may well end the campaign with over 40 goals and assists combined in all competitions. Without a troublesome ankle injury earlier in the campaign, it would be even more.

"I've been unlucky with injuries, but I've scored some goals and given some assists. I've just tried to enjoy my football," he says.

While he has been used in a variety of positions across the front-line, he is clear on his best position: "I prefer to play on the left; it means I can face up to the opponent and that is when I can use my strength, accelerating with the ball. That is also possible from the No.10 position, so I feel really good there."

Inevitably, there has been speculation about his future amid Europe-wide interest, with Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool among the clubs said to be keeping an eye on him ahead of the summer transfer window.

"I see the attention that is coming, but I try to stay calm and not read it. Everybody has an opinion and everyone wants to speak about it or show me. I'm focused on PSV.

"The Premier League is a great competition with great intensity. I have friends there like Steven Bergwijn at Tottenham. I used to play with him here; we keep in touch and talk when we are with the national team. He tells me what is going on with him and I tell him things from my side. It is an impressive league; I love watching it.

"I want to improve and be more decisive for the team on a consistent level; every game I have to be there and show all the quality I have. I can be stronger physically, of course, but I have to keep progressing. I knew

PSV
METROPOOLREGIO
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I was capable of what I have done this season; I think I can do more. When I work hard and feel good, I'm one of those players who can show my quality, but the team has helped because we've played some big games and that has allowed me to do more things individually.

"I know the opposition look at me more than before because I have scored goals, but I just have to try harder, keep on going. We have other good players, so if the opposition is looking at me, it might free up another player to score and we can still win."

Growing up close to Eindhoven, like most of his peers, Gakpo spent his days playing football until deep into the evenings. His parents, a Togolese father with Ghanaian ancestry and a Dutch mother, have been there through every step supporting him. That, he says, has been paramount to his success.

"I started playing when I was four at the local amateur club and joined PSV aged six," he recalls fondly. "I had a great childhood, playing football almost every day with my friends in the neighbourhood. There were some stupid things everybody does when they are young, but most of the time, I wanted to play football and enjoy every moment outside. At PSV, I had to consider my games at the weekend; it meant I had to go home earlier than my friends, which was difficult, but it worked out. I would try to stay out as long as I could after school until my mum or my dad came to get me for dinner. Then after, we'd go back out again. You try to keep that freedom as close as possible in the

Direct dribbler... Gakpo running with the ball

Cup winner...PSV players celebrate with Gakpo after his decisive goal against arch-rivals Ajax

Oranje starlet...Gakpo celebrates his first Netherlands goal in a 2022 World Cup qualifier against Montenegro

Idol...Gakpo bases his game on Thierry Henry

academy and add it to your game.

"My family support me through the good and bad; I still work on my game with my dad. When we have time, we go and play in a park somewhere and he explains things to help me improve. He will tell me what I've done well, what I can work on and we train. They help to protect me from pressure and attention, so the only pressure I feel is the pressure I put on myself."

Although he was a PSV supporter growing up, Gakpo looked further afield for influence and he still does today. Among his heroes was Thierry Henry, who he tries to model his game on.

"I still watch Henry on YouTube," Gakpo says with a smile. "He was one of the best players when he played. I followed him when he was at Arsenal a little bit, but I was young. When he went to Barcelona, he played with [Lionel] Messi and [Samuel] Eto'o. I really looked at those players. When I got older and physically matured I thought about who I could learn from the best.

"Of course, you want to look at Messi or [Cristiano] Ronaldo, but they have a different body type to me; Henry is much more similar. He was tall like me and also played a similar position, a little bit on the wing, up front or in a free role. I still have a lot to learn from him, but that is why I watch his clips again and again. You can see how he handled certain situations, and you can compare yourself quality-wise but also physically. I want to improve, so I look at him."

Speaking to Gakpo, it becomes abundantly clear that he thinks incredibly deeply about football, his own game and how he can impact matches. Next season, if he stays at PSV, he will be reunited with a former coach from his youth days. Ruud van Nistelrooy, who has been named as Roger Schmidt's successor at the Philips Stadion. He will take over in the summer.

"He was in the academy; in the Under-15s, U16s, U17s and U18s, and we'd do individual training. The strikers would go with Ruud, the midfielders with Mark van Bommel and the defenders with Andre Ooijer.

"He did a lot of work with us on finishing and in certain situations, and was a great help; we got along really well as a coach and player on the pitch, but away from the pitch, too. I have a really good connection with him and I'm glad he is going to be the new coach."

> "The Premier League is a great competition with great intensity…it is an impressive league; I love watching it"

Gakpo will also be working with a new coach at international level soon, too. Having made his debut under Frank de Boer at Euro 2020 – an 11-minute cameo in a 3-0 victory over North Macedonia – he has continued to feature under his successor, Louis van Gaal. Having been diagnosed with prostate cancer, the 70-year-old will step down after this year's World Cup to be replaced by Ronald Koeman.

"The Euros were a great experience, I was very happy to be there. It is natural you want to play every game. But I was the new guy; I understood my role, trained hard and made a good impression.

The notoriously authoritarian Van Gaal has described Gakpo as a "great talent" with "a lot of experience to gain", and handed him his first three starts at the end of 2021. Gakpo netted his first international goal in the 4-0 win over Montenegro, yet fell foul of the coach a month later in the victory over Latvia. According to reports, sub Noa Lang, the Club Brugge star, swapped wings with Gakpo without the consent of the coach, who instantly swapped them back.

"The new coach is very demanding with what he wants and the players try to deliver, nobody has a problem with that. He is an amazing coach, who tries to help us reach a new level. I'm grateful he's chosen me in the last few Dutch squads and I'm hoping to go to the World Cup."

Big moments feel sure to be a part of Gakpo's future, but his mindset is strong. Like any player, he dreams of reaching the very top, but is continuing to ignore all the talk and thrive on the pressure.

"Every player wants to play at the highest level possible," he concludes. "When you see things like the Champions League, it is fantastic to watch. I'd love to reach that level, so it is about working hard to reach my goals. Hopefully I can get there with PSV; we don't know what the future holds."

Glenn Moore

Lyon want their title back

French side will attempt to reclaim the Champions League crown for a record eighth time against current holders Barcelona

This year's UEFA Women's Champions League final will have the stamp of a heavyweight title unification bout.

In the *Blaugrana* corner stands the holders Barcelona, the women's game's new dominant force. Facing them in Turin will be Olympique Lyon, the revived all-conquering predecessors.

By the time the trophy is presented on May 21 we will know whether Barca have truly usurped Lyon's crown, or were merely keeping it warm while Ada Hegerberg was injured.

To suggest Barcelona's title last year, sealed with an emphatic 4-0 win over Chelsea, was merely because of the Norwegian's absence is to overstate the case, but Lyon had won the previous five competitions with Hegerberg in the team, the striker scoring 48 goals in 39 games in the process.

However, the 25-year-old ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee in January 2020, missed the latter part of Lyon's COVID-delayed success that season, and didn't return until November 2021. While she was away Lyon were knocked out at the quarter-final stage of last season's Champions League by Paris Saint-Germain, who also broke Lyon's 14-year hold on the domestic title.

Now Hegerberg is back and she has quickly regained form, scoring in both Lyon's quarter-final defeat of Juventus and a semi-final revenge win over PSG.

With Lyon well placed to regain their domestic pre-eminence, toppling Barcelona is next on the agenda.

"There was women's football before Barcelona, and it was played here for years," Hegerberg said pointedly in April. She added: "We have to win again to regain our place in world football."

Barcelona will not be easy to dethrone. There is a real sense of momentum around the Catalan giants, bolstered by successive world-record attendances at the Nou Camp.

Barcelona recorded the highest official attendance for a women's match when 91,553 spectators watched their quarter-final second leg against Real Madrid. A 5-2 win gave them an 8-3 aggregate victory.

The Nou Camp crowd (*socios* attended free, others paid) must have enjoyed the experience. Even more turned up (91,648) for the first leg of their semi-final. This was despite the opposition being the less glamorous Wolfsburg rather than their *Clasico* arch-rivals from the capital.

They were rewarded with another sparkling display of football in a 5-1 win. Wolfsburg, seemingly overawed by the atmosphere and missing defensive shield Lena Oberdorf, conceded twice in the opening ten minutes through Aitana Bonmati and Caroline Graham Hansen. Barca were 4-0 up by the 38th, through Jenni Hermoso and Alexia Putellas. After Jill Roord pulled a goal back, Putellas, holder of multiple world player of the year awards, restored the four-goal cushion with a late penalty.

It could have been many more but for Wolfsburg keeper Almuth Schult, who made 16 saves as Barcelona launched wave after wave of attacks.

That was Barcelona's 40th victory in 40 matches this season. However, that run was brought to an end in front of 22,057 in Germany. Wolfsburg, who should have scored more than once in the first leg, played with a far greater intensity. By the hour-mark it was 5-3 on aggregate with Tabea Wassmuth and Roord scoring.

Barca held on but their display will give Lyon hope, as will the fact that Real Madrid led in both legs of the quarter-final. Not that OL lack belief after seeing off PSG in both legs, albeit narrowly.

> "There was women's football before Barcelona, and it was played here for years. We have to win again to regain our place in world football"
>
> Lyon forward Ada Hegerberg

Holders... Barcelona celebrate their fifth goal v Wolfsburg

Talismanic...Lyon's Ada Hegerberg celebrates scoring in the semi-final

Catarina Macario scored twice in the 4-3 aggregate victory against fast-improving Juventus in the quarters, and the American international struck twice in the semi-final first leg too, as Lyon edged a five-goal thriller in front of 22,774. That attendance was almost doubled in Paris as a French club record 43,255 saw Wendie Renard score a late trademark header and kill off home hopes in a 2-1 Lyon win. The fact that Lyon's Chilean goalkeeper Christiane Endler was player of the match underlined PSG's threat.

So to Turin, and an intriguing clash of styles. Lyon, with Hegerberg as the focal point, are the more direct of the two. Barca, like their men's teams, prefer to play a possession game that relies on passing geometry to draw defenders out of position and release the likes of Graham Hansen behind defences.

With an average 66.3 per cent possession and 88.7 per cent passing accuracy they are well ahead of Lyon in that aspect (53.9 per cent and 79.6 per cent respectively), and have also scored 37 goals to Lyon's 28.

But Lyon have experience, squad depth, an excellent goalkeeper, a quick, powerful defence and are dangerous in the air. Left-back Selma Bacha, who takes most corners and free-kicks, has eight assists, twice as many as anyone in the competition except Barca's Fridolina Rolfo (six).

Barcelona, given their imperious form over the last two years, will start as favourites, but it would be very rash to write off Lyon.

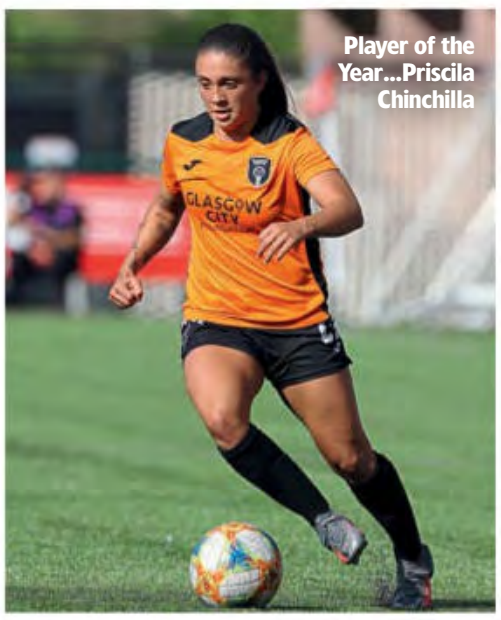
Round-up

Suspended...Houston Dash head coach James Clarkson

DASH SUSPEND CLARKSON

James Clarkson, the head coach and general manager of Houston Dash, has been suspended following a recommendation made by the joint investigation into "current and historic complaints of discrimination, harassment and abuse" by the NWSL and its players association.

Clarkson said: "As a coach I love the team and have always respected my players and staff. Any such allegations are absolutely not true."



Player of the Year...Priscila Chinchilla

CHINCHILLA IS SCOTS' FIRST AWARD WINNER

Costa Rica's Priscila Chinchilla was named the first Scottish players' union Women's Footballer of the Year. The Glasgow City forward arrived in Scotland aged 18 in December 2020 with no English and no football due to the pandemic, but survived and thrived.

ITALY GO PRO

Italy's Serie A has confirmed it will turn professional from next season. Although there was a degree of semi-professionalism in the 1970s and '80s, attracting many overseas players, the league was until recently under the aegis of the National Amateur League (LND), which in theory limited most payments to expenses.

That arrangement was doomed after the LND chief allegedly derided players as "a bunch of lesbians" at a 2015 meeting to develop the sport. The Italian football federation (FIGC), which runs the top three men's tiers, subsequently took over and began the push to professionalism.

CONCACAF LAUNCH CHAMPIONSHIP

The inaugural 2022 CONCACAF W Championship launches in July with Mexico staging an eight-team tournament. World Cup holders United States meet Haiti in the opening game in Monterrey. The hosts and Jamaica make up Group A. Olympic champions Canada are joined in Group B by Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad & Tobago.

The event doubles up as the regional qualifying competition for the 2023 World Cup.

Heading home... Tobin Heath

HEATH SPELL ENDS WITH INJURY

Two-time World Cup winner Tobin Heath left Arsenal after sustaining a hamstring injury that ruled her out of action until the end of the season. The United States forward scored three goals in 18 appearances after arriving on a one-year deal last autumn.

Elsewhere, Canadian forward Janine Beckie left Manchester City to join Portland Thorns in the NWSL, while former England internationals Karen Bardsley and Anita Asante announced their retirements.

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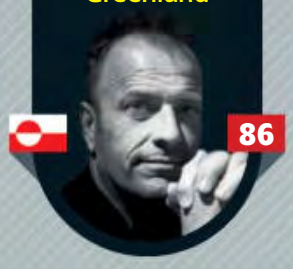

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UEFA World Cup play-offs

JARED TINSLAY

Scotland and Ukraine in semi-final showdown

The rescheduled European Path A World Cup play-off decides who faces Wales in the final at the Cardiff City Stadium

International comeback... it promises to be an emotional night for Ukraine

The delayed World Cup play-off semi-final between Scotland and Ukraine is upon us. It's set to be a match full of emotion as the war-torn visitors prepare for their first game since the Russian invasion.

Ukraine have several domestically-based players, with the majority at either Dynamo Kyiv or Shakhtar Donetsk. The Ukrainian government granted them special visas to leave the country to train, with both sides embarking on a Global Tour for Peace in April to raise money for war victims ahead of their national team training camp.

Ukraine head coach Oleksandr Petrakov had hoped to prepare in their homeland – in the city of Uzhhorod near the border with Hungary and Slovakia – for his side's Hampden Park showdown, however that idea was thought better of.

"Unfortunately, the plan to prepare for the match against Scotland in the western region of the country has been abandoned," he said.

"It is far too dangerous. We run the risk of Russia finding out our location and they could launch a planned, deliberate missile strike directly at us."

Both Petrakov and Ukrainian FA president Andriy Pavelko also dismissed any suggestion of Ukraine being given a bye to the finals in Qatar.

The two sides were due to meet in Glasgow on June 7 for their Nations League group clash, but that has now been moved back to September to help accommodate the World Cup play-off, which will be of huge significance both on and off the pitch.

As Scottish FA chief executive Ian Maxwell stated: "While, understandably, there will be two sets of competitive players who are committed to taking another step closer to World Cup qualification, we also understand and appreciate the wider context in which the match will take place."

Steve Clarke's side are two games away from their first World Cup since 1998, and go into their semi-final on the back of an eight-game unbeaten run. Only between October 2019 and November 2020 have the national team enjoyed a longer unbeaten streak under Clarke.

Their two friendlies in March – against Poland and Austria – ended in 1-1 and 2-2 draws respectively, although they did surrender leads in both games; something which Clarke described as a "little downer".

Perhaps more disconcerting are the recent injuries to two of his star men from the draw with Poland; goalscorer Kieran Tierney and Man of the Match Nathan Patterson. The Arsenal and Everton defenders are in a race to return to fitness but, even if they do recover, thay may not be at their best.

Home advantage shouldn't be ignored though, with every ticket snapped up by the Tartan Army. There should be a raucous, but respectful, atmosphere at Hampden, which could definitely play its part.

The same could be said for the 33,000-seater Cardiff City Stadium; the venue for the play-off final, where Wales have now gone 16 games unbeaten (and 18 games at home overall if you count friendlies in Swansea and Wrexham).

Last November, Football Association of Wales (FAW) chief executive Noel Mooney even rejected the idea of maximising revenue by hosting the final at the 74,500-capacity Principality Stadium.

"Anyone who was there [at the Cardiff City Stadium] at the Belgium game to see the 'Red Wall', the anthem for me was quite spectacular, the atmosphere throughout the game.

"I'm convinced the fans got us through in the end, along with the great efforts of our players, because the energy from our fans was just amazing."

The atmosphere was equally, if not more, electric for their 2-1 victory over Austria in their play-off semi-final in March, with Gareth Bale's majestic free-kick sparking ecstatic celebrations both on and off the pitch.

It was a remarkable moment of quality from the Wales captain, who was a doubt for the game after missing Real Madrid's defeat to Barcelona; something that didn't go down well with the local media.

Limited to just five La Liga games this season by the end of April, the 32-year-old will, as always, be the focal point of attack for The Dragons. He's proven on countless occasions his ability to raise his game for his country, even when not playing regular club football.

But Rob Page's side certainly aren't a one-man team. This is the most successful period in Wales' history, with the national team qualifying for back-to-back European Championships and progressing to the knockout rounds in both. That's the sign of a good side, not one reliant on a single player.

There is genuine belief that this will be the team to end The Dragons' 64-year wait to play at a World Cup, and avoid painfully falling at the final hurdle as many previous Welsh sides have infamously suffered.

Hope...Scotland are aiming for a first World Cup appearance since 1998

> **"Unfortunately, the plan to prepare for the match against Scotland in the western region of the country has been abandoned. It is far too dangerous"**
>
> Ukraine coach Oleksandr Petrakov

Wales talisman... Gareth Bale

"Red Wall"...the passionate Cardiff crowd awaits the winners

Qatar

SAMINDRA KUNTI

Preview

Inter-confederational play-offs

Five teams head to Qatar in June for the intercontinental play-offs, but only two of them will be back again in November for the World Cup finals

The World Cup in Qatar, the first one to be held in the Arab world, is drawing near. Lusail Iconic Stadium, the venue for the final, has been completed; La'eeb, in the form of a traditional keffiyeh headdress, will serve as a mascot; and Al Rihla, the ball, will decide the destiny of the 32 participants.

In an unprecedented scenario, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine changed the calendar, meaning that – for the first time since 1974 – the World Cup draw took place with the final line-up still to be determined.

Two of the final three tickets will be decided by two inter-confederational play-offs in Doha. The action begins on June 7, when Australia and the United Arab Emirates play to decide who Asia's representatives will be. A week later, the winner will take on Peru for the right to join world champions France, Tunisia and Denmark in Group D at the World Cup.

After disappointing campaigns, both the Socceroos and the UAE finished third in their respective groups in the final round of World Cup qualifying in Asia. Graham Arnold's team were insipid for much of their campaign. In a crunch qualifier in March at Stadium Australia, the backdrop to many of Australia's finest moments in the game – most notably John Aloisi's famous penalty against Uruguay to end a 32-year World Cup wait – they succumbed to two late Japanese goals, condemning them to the play-offs for a second consecutive time.

The UAE fared no better. In January, they dismissed their Dutch coach Bert

Emerging talent ...UAE midfielder Hareb Abdullah

van Marwijk, incidentally the man who had coached the Aussies at the 2006 World Cup. The Dutchman imposed too much of a possession-based style, which did not fit the players at his disposal.

With a fine record in the UAE League, his successor Rodolfo Arruabarrena's style is more hands-on and realistic. Among his innovations was to hand a chance to Hareb Abdullah, an old acquaintance from his time at local club Shabab Al Ahli, and the 19-year-old rewarded the Argentine's faith in him by netting the winner against South Korea. That result, as well as the UAE's 1-0 victory against Australia and Arnold at the 2019 Asian Cup, will strengthen the belief of the Emirati.

Whichever of the two AFC nations progress, the favourites will be Peru, appearing in the play-offs for the second consecutive time

Whichever of the two AFC nations progress, the favourites will be Peru, appearing in the play-offs for the second consecutive time. They reached the 2018 World Cup in Russia by overcoming New Zealand 2-0 on aggregate, and head to Qatar having sealed fifth place in South American qualifying off the back of just one defeat, and four victories, in their last six qualifiers. A 2-0 win over Paraguay in the final game ensured that they edged out Colombia by a single point.

The Peruvians and their successful coach Ricardo Gareca can teach both Australia and the UAE a thing or two. Their domestic football is in crisis and the current team is not better than previous generations, but under Gareca they have gotten the basics right, and are playing football as a unit. They defend and attack as one. Record scorer Paolo Guerrero and Jefferson Farfan have both been phased out of the side and not been missed.

In short, Peru will fear neither the UAE nor Australia, the team they defeated 2-0 at the 2018 World Cup.

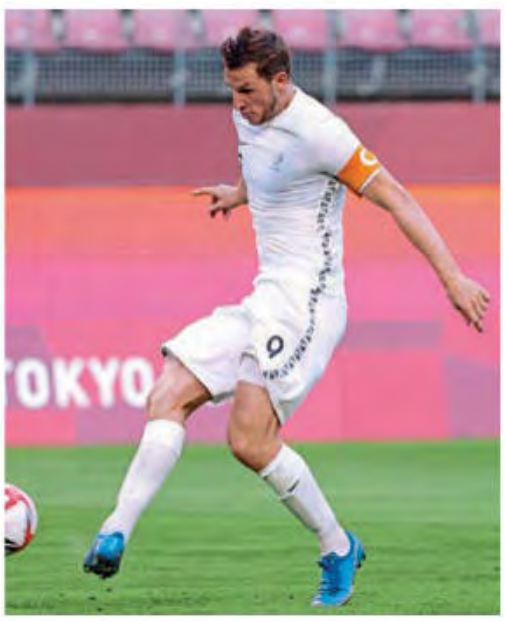
On June 14, Oceania powerhouse New Zealand and Costa Rica, the fourth-ranked team from CONCACAF's World Cup qualifiers, will compete for the very last ticket to Qatar. Although this encounter seems more balanced, the Western hemisphere side might again have the edge.

In the OFC qualifiers, the All Whites struggled to break down the massed defences of both Solomon Islands and Tahiti. Although they lacked creativity and tactical variation, coach Danny Hay did praise his young team for their composure. The vast majority of the current squad have less than a dozen caps. Captain and defensive anchor Winston Reid is currently unattached and striker Chris Wood has been far from prolific since joining Newcastle United for £25 million in January.

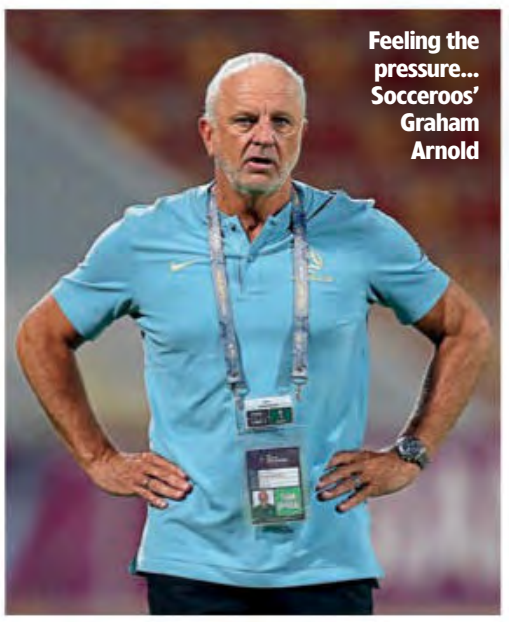
Hay's optimism will be much needed against Costa Rica, who are at the other end of the spectrum. The *Ticos* are an ageing squad: at 34, Kendall Waston still leads the defence, captain Bryan Ruiz is now a super sub at 36 and striker Joel Campbell, once of Arsenal, will turn 30 at the end of June.

Even so, Costa Rica finished the qualifiers in barnstorming fashion with 19 points from their last seven matches to pip Panama to fourth place. They will seek to ride that momentum and reach a third consecutive World Cup.

New Zealand last featured in the global finals in 2010 when Reid, Wood and Tommy Smith, three survivors from that squad, almost reached the second round. They know that, even if they successfully negotiate the clash with Costa Rica, a repeat will be difficult to repeat – Germany, Spain and Japan await the winners in Group E.


Talismanic...New Zealand striker Chris Wood

One last hurrah...Costa Rica veteran Bryan Ruiz


Feeling the pressure... Socceroos' Graham Arnold

Europe

KEIR RADNEDGE

UEFA Nations League

2022-23 campaign begins with a bumper summer schedule

The pandemic fall-out and the disruption caused by the winter World Cup might have given a haphazard feel to this year's Nations League schedule, but players, managers and fans are coming around to the value of the tournament ahead of its third edition.

The opening stage of the 2022-23 Nations League is scheduled for a busy first fortnight in June at a time when, normally, excitement would be building ahead of the World Cup kick-off. In that context the Nations League may appear something of a damp squib. But it provides important team-building opportunities for both World Cup finalists and Qatar absentees planning and plotting ahead of the Euro 2024 qualifiers.

All but one of European federation's 55 members will be competing in 14 groups – including Wales, Ukraine and Scotland, despite their simultaneous tangles over Europe's last World Cup slot in Qatar. Their schedules have had to be adjusted after the footballing fall-out from Russia's military invasion of Ukraine.

Almost all the teams will play six matches apiece, four in June and then two in the closing week of September. Promotion and relegation between the groups is factored in to the competitive equation, but only the League A nations can compete for access to the four-team finals in June next year. The venue is still to be confirmed, with Belgium, Poland, Netherlands and Wales – the four nations from Group A4 – declaring an interest in hosting. Unless any rival bids come in by the October 5 deadline, the nation that wins the group will most likely be the venue.

No one can view a return to the drawing board via the Nations League as more important than Italy. The *Azzurri* crashed from the sublime to the ridiculous on failing to qualify for the World Cup finals only nine months after edging England on penalties in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley.

Italy were so clearly the most outstanding outfit in the Euro finals that their humiliation by North Macedonia in the World Cup play-off semi-final was all the more embarrassing.

Holders... France won the last edition of the UEFA Nations League in 2021

Under pressure... Italy head coach Roberto Mancini

Vastly improved...Hansi Flick took charge of Germany in August 2021

Roberto Mancini managed to retain his job as head coach but will be on trial in every single match in a difficult schedule. Italy's ten-day June tightrope includes home and away clashes against Hansi Flick's vastly improved old rivals Germany, a home match against Hungary and another meeting with England.

This will be staged at Molineux in Wolverhampton and will carry direct echoes of Wembley since it will be played behind closed doors because of the security failings that marred the Euro final. On a happier note, England's four-match sequence could see 49-goal Harry Kane close in on Wayne Rooney's 53-goal national team marksmanship record.

Mancini, in starting to re-set the Italian stage, has appealed for media and fans to refrain from exaggerating the significance of the World Cup exit – as if that were possible, amid the fevered ambience surrounding the *Azzurri*, win, lose or draw.

> "There are important national teams who have not won anything for 60 years. Italy are a little further ahead in this, despite some disappointments"
>
> Roberto Mancini, Italy head coach

Forgotten already is that world record 37-game unbeaten run which came to an end last October with a 2-1 loss against Spain in the last Nations League semi-finals. Mancini said: "There are important national teams who have not won anything for 60 years. Italy are a little further ahead in this, despite some disappointments, and I believe the work in these three years has been appreciated.

"Certainly we have to start over. We will include younger players in the national team, in the hope that they will have more opportunities in their clubs as well."

France won the 2020-21 Nations League after beating Spain 2-1 last October, and Group A1 will see them confront their World Cup group rivals in Denmark. Group 2's outcome may be dictated by the opening clash matching Spain against neighbours Portugal in Seville. Group 4 will be opened by Wales visiting Poland in Wroclaw but with their minds on the World Cup play-off back in Cardiff four days later against Ukraine or Scotland.

Rob Page, in caretaker charge ever since legal priorities sidelined Ryan Giggs, would doubtless have preferred a postponement of the Polish distraction but, of course, the crowded calendar is king. Belgium and Netherlands complete the group.

Further down the Nations League an unhappy coincidence has seen World Cup play-off rivals Ukraine and Scotland drawn together in League B1. One report even suggested that the play-off between the two sides could double up as a Nations League fixture, but their two group clashes will now take place in September.

Meanwhile, Russia are the one aforementioned nation who will not take part in the 2022-23 campaign. They were drawn in League B2 with Albania, Israel and Iceland but, following further UEFA sanctions, have been barred from the competition and will automatically be ranked fourth and thus relegated to League C at the end of the group stage.

THE DRAW

LEAGUE A

GROUP 1
- Austria
- Croatia
- Denmark
- France

GROUP 2
- Czech Republic
- Portugal
- Spain
- Switzerland

GROUP 3
- England
- Germany
- Hungary
- Italy

GROUP 4
- Belgium
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Wales

LEAGUE B

GROUP 1
- Armenia
- Republic of Ireland
- Scotland
- Ukraine

GROUP 2
- Albania
- Iceland
- Israel
- Russia (R)

GROUP 3
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Finland
- Montenegro
- Romania

GROUP 4
- Norway
- Serbia
- Slovenia
- Sweden

LEAGUE C

GROUP 1
- Faroe Islands
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Turkey

GROUP 2
- Cyprus
- Greece
- Kosovo
- Northern Ireland

GROUP 3
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Kazakhstan
- Slovakia

GROUP 4
- Bulgaria
- Georgia
- Gibraltar
- North Macedonia

LEAGUE D

GROUP 1
- Andorra
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Moldova

GROUP 2
- Estonia
- Malta
- San Marino

Africa

MARK GLEESON

The road to Abidjan

Group stage of 2023 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying gets underway in June ahead of next year's tournament in Ivory Coast

Preview

Hosts...Ivory Coast went out in the round of 16 at the last AFCON

Holders Senegal have been handed a comfortable route to the next Africa Cup of Nations and will begin the qualifying campaign for Ivory Coast 2023 almost five months to the day after winning their first continental title.

But it is probably not what they need less than six months away from competing at the World Cup finals.

They are scheduled to take on Benin in their opening Group L qualifier and then play away in Rwanda in June. But they would be better served taking on South American or Asian opponents for a better sense of what they are to face at the World Cup finals.

Unlike Europe and the CONCACAF region, where they are beginning their Nations League campaigns, Africa is using June's international matchdays, plus those in September, as qualifiers for the next Cup of Nations. As a result, the level of competition for the World Cup-bound teams could turn out to be far from taxing and far from sufficient.

African champions... Senegal star Sadio Mane

Senegal's predicament is shared by the other four African representatives in Qatar: Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Tunisia.

They must all play their first two qualifiers in June and then two more in September, before completing qualification in March 2023, some three months before the tournament kicks off in the Ivory Coast.

The qualifying draw was conducted in late April and is a fairly standard assignment for the continent's leading football powers.

The two top teams in each of the 12 groups advance, except Group H, where hosts Ivory Coast already have their place assured, and the highest finisher out of Comoros, Lesotho

and Zambia will qualify.

Zambia are among those who missed out on the last finals, hosted at the start of the year, and will be looking to make amends. They should be too strong for the other two in the group, even after all the heroics that the tiny Comoros Islands performed at the tournament in Cameroon.

Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa are other countries seeking to restore battered reputations.

Angola were drawn in Group E along with top seeds Ghana, Madagascar and the Central African Republic while the Congolese, who have kept Hector Cuper on as coach despite losing in the March World Cup play-offs, are in Group I with Gabon, Mauritania and Sudan.

South Africa were drawn in Group K alongside Morocco, a country with which they have frosty relations.

South Africa were among the handful of African countries who did not support Morocco's unsuccessful bid to host the 2026 World Cup finals, giving their vote instead to the successful combined bid by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

It was a political decision over the disputed Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony that Morocco annexed in 1975. South Africa, like many other countries in the region with former liberation movements now serving as ruling parties, supports the so-called Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, established by the Polisario Front, which is fighting Morocco over the disputed territory.

This antagonism is unlikely to be felt by the footballers themselves but always adds an edge to any confrontation between Morocco and South Africa.

Grudge match... South Africa and Morocco last met at the 2019 AFCON

The level of competition for the World Cup-bound teams could turn out to be far from taxing and far from sufficient

After both Comoros and the Gambia made debut appearances at the Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon at the start of the year, there are only ten of the 54 African member countries yet to compete in the finals.

Of them, Djibouti, Eritrea (who withdrew before playing, yet again), Seychelles and Somalia did not make it past the preliminary rounds of matches in March but Eswatini might fancy their chances of a top-two finish in Group B (with Burkina Faso, Cape Verde Islands and Togo) and a first-ever place in the finals.

The small southern African kingdom have made major progress in continental club football with top team Royal Leopard reaching the group stage of the African Confederation Cup where they picked up invaluable experience, even if they had to play all their "home" matches outside of the country because there is no stadium up to scratch for the hosting of internationals inside of Eswatini.

That is also the case for many other African countries as the Confederation of African Football continues to crack down on poor facilities. As was the case with last year's World Cup qualifiers, many countries will be forced to move their matches to neutral venues, and will thus lose the advantage of home stadiums packed with their own fans.

AFCON heroics... Comoros are hoping to reach only their second-ever finals

THE DRAW

GROUP A
- Guinea-Bissau
- Nigeria
- Sao Tome e Principe
- Sierra Leone

GROUP B
- Burkina Faso
- Cape Verde
- Eswatini
- Togo

GROUP C
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Kenya
- Namibia

GROUP D
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Guinea
- Malawi

GROUP E
- Angola
- Central African Rep
- Ghana
- Madagascar

GROUP F
- Algeria
- Niger
- Tanzania
- Uganda

GROUP G
- Congo
- Gambia
- Mali
- South Sudan

GROUP H
- Comoros
- Ivory Coast
- Lesotho
- Zambia

GROUP I
- DR Congo
- Gabon
- Mauritania
- Sudan

GROUP J
- Botswana
- Equatorial Guinea
- Libya
- Tunisia

GROUP K
- Liberia
- Morocco
- South Africa
- Zimbabwe

GROUP L
- Benin
- Mozambique
- Rwanda
- Senegal

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Update

Shock...Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim pipped champions of Japan Kawasaki Frontale in Group I

Upsets in group stage

Leading contenders for the AFC Champions League fall at the first hurdle

At one time, the group stage of the Asian Champions League used to take place over a period of three months. But this year, due to COVID circumstances, it happened over the space of a few weeks in April and May. Clubs from the usual suspects of Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea provided eight of the 16 teams that made it to the knockout stages, but that does not mean there were no surprises.

The tournament is divided into two geographic halves until the final, and in the western zone, Qatari powerhouse Al Sadd were the biggest failures.

It didn't help that all five groups in the west were hosted in Saudi Arabia, but even without any home advantage, Al Sadd were seen as good enough to not only get out of their group but to win the whole thing. This is a team that won their league unbeaten for the second season running, had Santi Cazorla and Andre Ayew pulling the strings as well as the Algerian goal machine Baghdad Bounedjah and much of Qatar's national team. Coach Xavi may have left for Barcelona but former Watford and Valencia boss Javi Gracia had picked up where his countryman had left off.

But just like Xavi last year, Gracia failed in Asia as the Doha club finished third in their group.

Saudi Arabia dominated. The Riyadh duo, defending champions Al Hilal and Al Shabab, made it look easy by progressing with games to spare, and were joined by debutants Al Faisaly.

Holders... Saudi side Al Hilal safely advanced through

Al Sadd were seen as good enough to not only get out of their group but to win the whole thing

The one Saudi team to not make it, Al Taawoun, fell foul of Al Duhail. The free-scoring Qataris, taken over by Argentine Hernan Crespo in March, have the firepower with Edmilson Junior finishing as top scorer in the group stage with eight goals. With Kenya's Michael Olunga and Qatar's star striker Almoez Ali in attack, they have a front-line that can score for fun, yet the defence has issues – despite the presence of Belgium centre-back Toby Alderweireld.

Al Rayyan, even without injured Colombian James Rodriguez, made it through as one of the best runners-up to give Qatar a second representative in the second round.

The UAE saw Sharjah and Al Jazira exit but Shabab Al Ahli recovered from a shaky start to give the country a team in the last 16, while Foolad made sure that Iranian fans have a club to cheer following the disqualification of giants Persepolis and Esteghlal. Nasaf Qarshi of Uzbekistan complete the eight teams from the western zone.

There were encouraging performances from Mumbai City who became the first Indian team to win a game in the tournament and even finished second behind Al Shabab.

From 2005 to 2019, only one western team (Al Sadd in 2011) lifted the trophy as the east dominated. Yet that era feels over now with Al Hilal winning two of the last three.

On the eastern side, the Southeast Asian countries Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand hosted the five groups. While Japan and South Korea contributed five of the eight teams to progress (Urawa Reds, Yokohama F. Marinos and Vissel Kobe from the J.League and Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and Daegu FC from the K-League), others floundered.

With the Chinese Super League season scheduled to start at a similar time (though it did not), teams knew they would struggle to either leave the country due to lockdown or return home in time due to strict entry requirements. It led to Shanghai Port withdrawing and the other two, Guangzhou FC (Asian champions in 2013 and 2015) and Chinese champions Shandong Taishan, to send youth teams. They collected just one point between them, scoring two goals and conceding 48.

Australian woes in the tournament continued. Melbourne City looked like becoming only the second A-League team to progress to the second round since 2016 but stumbled right at the end. Sydney FC however, were never in contention.

The surprise in the east was that 2012 and 2020 champions Ulsan Hyundai of South Korea as well as Kawasaki Frontale, who have won four of the last five Japanese titles, finished behind Johor Darul Ta'zim and were eliminated. JDT became Malaysia's first-ever representatives in the knockout stages and, while they were helped by playing all the games in their home stadium, it was a significant achievement.

Southeast Asia has another team in the next round as BG Pathum United of Thailand won their group. Another notable name in the knockout stage is Kitchee of Hong Kong squeezing through behind big-spending Vissel Kobe of Japan.

The eastern zone starts its second round in August while those from the west have to wait until next February. It means that the sense that there are two separate tournaments in Asia has strengthened but it still looks like one of the big names will be there at the end.

For a full results round-up and the final standings, turn to page 94.

Eliminated...Al Sadd midfielder Santi Cazorla

Surprise group winners...BG Pathum United striker Ikhsan Fandi celebrates scoring against United City

Tahiti

SAMINDRA KUNTI

Tahiti looking east

United States may offer hope of progression for the tiny Pacific Islanders after their semi-final finish in the Oceania World Cup qualifiers

Club World Cup...Tahitian club side AS Pirae celebrate scoring against Al Jazira of UAE

World Cup qualifying...Tahiti lost 1-0 to New Zealand in Qatar

"Thanks, boys. We are proud of you!"

That was the message the staff of Tahiti's national team, led by coach Samuel Garcia, left on the blackboard at the team hotel following their semi-final defeat to New Zealand in the Oceania qualifiers. They had been just two matches away from a spot among the 32 World Cup finalists.

Yet, it had been a strange mini-tournament. Tahiti hadn't played a single game in almost three years, mainly because of the pandemic. Both the Cook Islands and Vanuatu withdrew from the competition due to COVID-19 outbreaks, and so, without a single win, Tahiti progressed to the last four in Doha, Qatar, where the qualifiers had been shifted to because of travel restrictions in Oceania.

After the 1-0 defeat against the All Whites, some of the players enjoyed a drink at the hotel's sports bar. In his room, replete with tactical line-ups, shirts and some cigarettes, coach Garcia, at the end of his contract with the Tahitian Football Federation (FTF), pondered the past, the present and the future. In the 1990s, the former defender, with a spell at Girondins de Bordeaux under his belt, had moved to Tahiti to finish his career with AS Venus before pursuing a coaching career.

Today, Garcia's former club AS Venus, as well as AS Dragon, AS Tefana and AS Pirae, the defending champions who participated in the recent Club World Cup, are the top clubs in the local top flight, an amateur league. The other eight clubs can't compete, according to Garcia. Without a strong league, there can't be a strong national team. He says: "The country, the communes no longer have the resources to invest, they don't invest as much as in the past for economic reasons. The level of the league has dropped. It's not balanced. That is not favourable for progress."

The old, almost insurmountable problems of geography and isolation – Tahiti is a six-hour flight from New Zealand and seven hours from the United States – as well as the amateurism at club level won't go away. Players spend the whole day at work before it's time to train. Even the national team captain Teaonui Tehau works at a plastic factory. Alongside his cousins, the twin brothers Lorenzo and Alvin Tehau, he featured for Tahiti in the 2009 Under-20 World Cup in Egypt. In Group B they played Spain, Nigeria and Venezuela, conceding 21 goals in the process.

"It was the first time that Tahiti qualified and it was historic," reflects Teaonui Tehau. "That changed our lives. We never thought that we were going to play a World Cup. We only watched it on TV. The fact of participating was something unforgettable. We made it click – everything was possible and we said that we wanted to relive those moments because those moments were unforgettable and magical."

That maiden participation in the finals of a major tournament was transformative for the national team. Tahiti won the 2012 OFC Cup and participated in the 2013 Confederations Cup, when four Tehaus were part of the squad. They were the whipping boys in Brazil, but the experience was priceless. Three years ago, the Tahitians were back at the Under-20 World Cup to cap off a golden decade.

The question is: what comes next? Can they sustain that success and aim even higher? Tehau quips that more of his family members are on the way: his younger brother Roonui played at the 2019 Under-20 World Cup in Poland, while Garcia also has confidence in the next generation. He singles out midfielder Terai Bremond, 20, striker Eddy Kaspard, 20, and Roonui from that team, as well as defender Francois Hapipi, 23. Kaspard and Hapipi are two of four squad members to ply their trade abroad, largely as semi-professionals, while Bremond was released by Toulouse last summer.

Garcia wants more Tahitians playing abroad, but the options are limited.

New Zealand's top flight is amateur. The country's only professional club, Wellington Phoenix, play in Australia, where the Men's A-League has a maximum quota of five foreign players per club. The solution, according to Garcia, is to look east: "We are thinking to send young players to the United States, where they can study with a scholarship, play well and develop. That's what we are thinking of today."

His captain echoes his view. Tehau says: "Sending players to the United States could lift the level, and when they return to the national team the level can match that of New Zealand."

Since Australia's departure from Oceania, defeating New Zealand remains the Holy Grail. The All Whites are now the continental superpower, but Garcia, Tehau and the Tahitians know that the 48-team 2026 World Cup changes the equation. "We lost 1-0 against New Zealand," says Garcia. "It wasn't 8-0, 7-0. That must motivate the federation. Why? At U17 and U20, the OFC has two places for the World Cup. In 2026, we will have 1.5 spots. The winner of the qualifiers will go directly and the second one will play the intercontinental play-off. We see that New Zealand is higher, that's normal, but there is work to do."

> **"Sending players to the United States could lift the level, and when they return to the national team the level can match that of New Zealand"**
>
> Tahiti captain Teaonui Tehau

Next generation...Terai Bremond at the Under-20 World Cup in 2019

Skipper...Teaonui Tehau competes with Javi Martinez of Spain at the 2013 Confederations Cup

Sri Lanka

JOHN DUERDEN

Tough times for Sri Lankan football

The country's new domestic league and national team have faced major setbacks over recent years

For the past five years, Sri Lanka have, on average, been Asia's lowest-ranked team in the FIFA rankings, lying south of 200 for the entire period along with the likes of San Marino and Somalia. That does not mean there has been no ambition on this cricket crazy island – there has been a determination to grow the game – but things tend to get in the way.

There was real excitement when the national team was drawn against South Korea in the second round of qualification for the 2022 World Cup. The first game was in October 2019 when the hosts ran out 8-0 winners to send over 23,000 fans in Hwaseong, just south of Seoul, home happy. It was also an experience that the South Asians will never forget with Son Heung-min scoring twice. "They worked hard and

World Cup qualifying...Sri Lanka defender Chamod Dilshan

Home stadium... Colombo Racecourse
Credit: Colombofc.com

Tragedy...former Sri Lanka defender Yogendran Duckson Puslas

were technically good," said Son after the game.

They were also delighted to face him. "To play against Son Heung-min, who is one of the best attackers in the Premier League, was amazing," Sri Lanka defender Yogendran Duckson Puslas said after the game. "His movement is like nothing I have seen before and he was so fast. It will be great to play against him in Colombo, the fans will be waiting and it will be a great atmosphere and be good for football in our country."

Sadly, Puslas passed away in February at the age of 31 having never got to face the Tottenham Hotspur star again. Son and his team-mates never played on the island either. Due to COVID, the game was postponed, and postponed again, until it was eventually decided to play all the remaining group matches in South Korea. The Sri Lanka federation had been ready to use the visit of the Koreans to play in what would have been a full Colombo Racecourse to promote the new developments taking place in local football.

The top tier of football in the country since 2009 had been the Sri Lanka Champions League, an amateur competition that came to an end in 2018. It was due to be replaced in April 2020 by the new Sri Lanka Super League, the first semi-professional and sustainable league in the country.

It was to feature ten teams, based on the Asian Football Confederation's licensing rules, which stipulate that basic standards must be met in fields such as medical care, youth development, marketing and elsewhere. There also have to be coaches for youth teams as well as general managers appointed. It was all helped by $500,000 from FIFA.

"Professional League is not just another competition; it is a totally new football industry with a professional employment contract for over 300 players, coaches and other officials. It also provides new business opportunities to many local entrepreneurs in this new football business," said Jaswar Umar, the federation's general secretary and the man behind the new league. "This was a missing part in Sri Lankan football structure for nearly 80 years."

It is not just the pandemic that has stopped the league getting going…Inflation is rampant, with food prices rising almost 25 per cent from when the Super League belatedly started in April 2021 to when it finished the following January

With COVID spreading internationally and the world entering lockdown, April 2020 was obviously a non-starter. It was pushed back to November and then January 2021. It finally kicked off behind closed doors in April but there were just two rounds played before the global pandemic intervened yet again. It restarted in November and finally finished in January 2022 with the teams facing each other just once in order to get it finished after nine games in the space of nine months.

Blue Star SC from the western part of the country, lost the opening game but recovered to win seven of the next eight to take the inaugural title. The Kalutara club from the southwest of the island went into the qualification round of the AFC Cup, Asia's second-tier tournament designed for developing nations, where they were thrashed 5-0 by Indian giants ATK Mohun Bagan.

It is not just the pandemic that has stopped the league getting going. Problems in the country mean that there is less money around from sponsors and broadcasters, and the general public have other things to think about. Inflation is rampant, with food prices rising almost 25 per cent from when the Super League belatedly started in April 2021 to when it finished the following January. The cost of medicines and fuel have increased. Power blackouts are a daily occurrence and often long – ten hours on March 30, for example.

Times are tough then, and not just in football. If the Super League can get past these early struggles then there is no reason why Sri Lanka can't start climbing those world rankings.

Outstanding...Son Heung-min takes on the Sri Lanka defence in Hwaseong in 2019

Greenland

STEVE MENARY

Greenland turns to CONCACAF

Island hoping to join the North, Central America and Caribbean confederation after UEFA rejection

Greenland team ... players take a break during the 2015 Island Games

Greenland's football association is planning to drop long-cherished ambitions of joining UEFA, and is instead applying to join CONCACAF.

The world's biggest island is a self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark and has long-standing cultural ties to Europe, but the Football Association of Greenland (KAK) is changing tack.

"We don't feel the Danish FA will assist us in our work. That's why we now have decided to look on the CONCACAF route," says Toennes Berthelsen, a former national team manager and board member at KAK, which was founded in 1971.

Greenland's only regular competitive outing is the football tournament at the biennial Island Games. The Polar-Bamserne have competed in all but one tournament since the first edition back in 1989 and were runners-up in 2013 and 2017.

> "We don't feel the Danish FA will assist us in our work. That's why we now have decided to look on the CONCACAF route"
>
> Toennes Berthelsen, former national team manager

The tournament proved a springboard for the Faroe Islands (winners in 1989 and 1991) and Gibraltar (champions in 2007) as both went on to secure UEFA and FIFA membership, which is currently worth around $1 million a year.

UEFA subsequently changed its membership criteria so that only places recognised as countries by the United Nations can join. As a result, Jersey opted to join the English non-league pyramid, but Greenland still have international aspirations.

Transport links are mainly with Europe but the Greenlanders already take part in the futsal tournament at the Arctic Winter Games, which has been hosted in parts of North America. Berthelsen adds: "We can either go over Denmark which is a long detour or we can fly direct to Iceland and from there to US or Canada."

The KAK would like to make contacts with the US and Canadian bodies for advice before approaching CONCACAF. "Secondly we would like to attend a CONCACAF meeting as observers so we can meet people and get an idea how an optimum application can look like," explains Berthelsen.

With no road network, Greenland cannot run a league. Instead, one town stages an annual championship for clubs from across the island. This year's event will be in the western coastal town of Ilulissat.

With a population of 56,000 and a strong, established football culture, the Greenland national side would be a match for most of the smaller Caribbean islands at the bottom rung of the CONCACAF Nations League.

If accepted into CONCACAF, Greenland would be unable to progress to FIFA membership – and the relative riches that brings – due to similar membership criteria as UEFA. However, CONCACAF has used money from FIFA's Forward Programme to help non-FIFA members – such as the Dutch island of Bonaire and the French territory Saint Martin – take part in the Nations League.

The next edition starts this June but that would be too early for Greenland, whose players will likely have to settle for the next Island Games. This has been pushed back a year due to COVID-19 and will be held in Guernsey.

Morten Rutkjaer, the Dane who took over as Greenland coach in 2020, plans to be in Guernsey with the team and also to play in CONCACAF competitions. "I hope we will be a part of CONCACAF in 2023," says Rutkjaer. "It's better and will be the same travelling. It's a big thing for the country to be a part of the football family."

After decades as one of football's outcasts, Greenland could be about to come in from the cold.

Ex-Greenland boss...Toennes Berthelsen

MAY 13-JUNE 11

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

(All kick-off times, if stated, are BST)

Friday May 13

ENGLAND: The Championship play-offs begin with the first leg of the first semi-final tie.

Saturday May 14

ENGLAND: Chelsea meet Liverpool at Wembley in the FA Cup final in a repeat of February's League Cup final. Elsewhere there's more play-off action in both the Championship and League Two.

Rematch...Chelsea v Liverpool at Wembley in February

SCOTLAND: The Premiership season concludes, with Celtic at home to Motherwell.
GERMANY: The Bundesliga season concludes, with champions Bayern Munich visiting Wolfsburg, while Borussia Dortmund face strugglers Hertha Berlin.
PORTUGAL: The Portuguese league season also comes to an end, with Porto potentially celebrating a title victory at home to Estoril.

Sunday May 15

WOMEN: The Women's FA Cup final takes place between Chelsea and Manchester City at Wembley.
NETHERLANDS: The Eredivisie league season concludes, with Feyenoord facing FC Twente, Ajax visiting Vitesse Arnhem and PSV at PEC Zwolle.

Monday May 16

ISRAEL: The UEFA Under-17 Championship begins in Israel.

Tuesday May 17

ASIA: The group stage of the 2022 AFC Cup commences.

Wednesday May 18

SPAIN: Seville's Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium hosts the Europa League final, between either West Ham United or Eintracht Frankfurt and Rangers or RB Leipzig.

Saturday May 21

WOMEN: The Champions League final takes place at the Juventus Stadium, with holders Barcelona facing French giants Lyon.
ENGLAND: The League One play-off final takes place at Wembley Stadium.
SCOTLAND: Rangers face Hearts in the Scottish FA Cup final.
GERMANY: There will be a first-time winner of the German Cup when Freiburg take on RB Leipzig in this season's final.
FRANCE: On the final day of Ligue 1, champions Paris Saint-Germain face strugglers Metz, while last season's title winners Lille travel to Rennes.

Sunday May 22

ENGLAND: On the final day of the Premier League season, title chasers Manchester City and Liverpool host Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers respectively, while strugglers Everton travel to Arsenal.
ITALY: Serie A also concludes with Internazionale facing Sampdoria, while Milan head to Sassuolo.
SPAIN: La Liga leaders Real Madrid host Copa del Rey winners Real Betis on the final day of the Spanish league season, while Barcelona face Villarreal and Real Sociedad take on Atletico Madrid.
PORTUGAL: Porto could complete a league-cup double when they face Tondela in the final of the Portuguese Cup at the Estadio Nacional, Lisbon.
VIETNAM: The final of the 2021 Southeast Asian Games takes place in Hanoi.

Tuesday May 24

SOUTH AMERICA: The final matchday of the Copa Libertadores group stage begins. Holders Palmeiras host Venezuelan outfit Deportivo Tachira, and Velez Sarsfield take on rivals Estudiantes in an all-Argentinian clash. The Sudamericana group stage also concludes.

Wednesday May 25

ALBANIA: The first-ever Europa Conference League final takes place in the Kombetare Arena, Tirana. Leicester City or Roma will take on Feyenoord or Marseille.

Saturday May 28

FRANCE: The Champions League final takes place in Paris between Liverpool or Villarreal and Real Madrid or Manchester City.
ENGLAND: Wembley is in use once again, this time staging the League Two play-off final.

Sunday May 29

AFRICA: The CAF Champions League final takes place, featuring either holders Al Ahly or ES Setif from Algeria, against Angolans Petro de Luanda or Moroccans Wydad. Qualifying for AFCON 2023 also gets underway.
ENGLAND: Football's "richest game" takes place with the Championship play-off final.

Wednesday June 1

EUROPE: Scotland face Ukraine in the semi-finals of the World Cup play-offs, while the Nations League also begins with Poland v Wales.
CONCACAF: The 2022-23 Nations League campaign begins with Panama v Costa Rica.

Thursday June 2

EUROPE: Spain v Portugal is the standout fixture from the second day of Nations League action.

Friday June 3

EUROPE: France meet Denmark, Belgium take on Netherlands and Croatia host Austria.

Saturday June 4

EUROPE: Italy renew their rivalry with Germany, while England travel to Budapest to face Hungary.

Sunday June 5

EUROPE: The winners of the World Cup play-off between Scotland and Ukraine head to Cardiff to face Wales for a place in Qatar. Meanwhile the Nations League continues, with Portugal v Switzerland and Czech Republic v Spain among the fixtures.

Monday June 6

EUROPE: Croatia take on France in the Nations League in a repeat of the 2018 World Cup final.

Tuesday June 7

QATAR: United Arab Emirates face Australia in the Asian World Cup qualifying play-off.
EUROPE: Germany will seek revenge for their Euro 2020 defeat when they face England in Munich, while Italy host Hungary.

Wednesday June 8

ASIA: The third round of qualifying for the 2023 Asian Cup begins.
EUROPE: Wales face-off against Netherlands in Cardiff, Scotland host Armenia and Republic of Ireland take on Ukraine in Dublin.

Saturday June 11

EUROPE: There are two Euro 2020 rematches, with Hungary v Germany and England v Italy – the latter behind closed doors at Molineux, Wolverhampton. Elsewhere Republic of Ireland face Scotland, Wales host Belgium and Netherlands take on Poland.
AUSTRALIA: Brazil take on Argentina in a friendly at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Famous venue... Melbourne Cricket Ground

USA: MLS 2022

ATLANTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Brad **GUZAN**	(37) 09.09.84
18	Bobby **SHUTTLEWORTH**	(35) 13.05.87
24	Dylan **CASTANHEIRA**	(26) 23.05.95

DEFENDERS

2	Ronald **HERNANDEZ** (Ven)	(24) 21.09.97
3	Alex **DEJOHN**	(31) 10.05.91
6	Alan **FRANCO** (Arg)	(25) 11.10.96
12	Miles **ROBINSON**	(25) 14.03.97
15	Andrew **GUTMAN**	(25) 02.10.96
26	Caleb **WILEY**	(17) 22.12.04
27	Bryce **WASHINGTON**	(23) 12.09.98
31	Erik **CENTENO**	(19) 29.06.02
32	George **CAMPBELL**	(20) 22.06.01
33	Mikey **AMBROSE**	(28) 05.10.93

MIDFIELDERS

5	Santiago **SOSA** (Arg)	(23) 03.05.99
8	Thiago **ALMADA** (Arg)	(21) 26.04.01
9	Matheus **ROSSETTO** (Bra)	(25) 03.06.96
10	Marcelino **MORENO** (Arg)	(27) 25.06.94
11	Brooks **LENNON**	(24) 22.09.97
13	Amar **SEJDIC** (Bih)	(25) 29.11.96
14	Franco **IBARRA** (Arg)	(21) 28.04.01
16	Osvaldo **ALONSO** (Cub)	(36) 11.11.85
20	Emerson **HYNDMAN**	(26) 07.04.96
23	Jake **MULRANEY** (Irl)	(26) 05.04.96

FORWARDS

4	Dom **DWYER**	(31) 30.07.90
7	Josef **MARTINEZ** (Ven)	(28) 19.05.93
19	**LUIZ ARAUJO** (Bra)	(25) 02.06.96
28	Tyler **WOLFF**	(19) 13.02.03
29	Ronaldo **CISNEROS** (Mex)	(25) 08.01.97
30	Machop **CHOL** (Ssd)	(23) 14.11.98
36	Jackson **CONWAY**	(20) 03.12.01
37	Aiden **MCFADDEN**	(23) 28.09.98

COACH

	Gonzalo **PINEDA** (Mex)	(39) 19.10.82

AUSTIN FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Brad **STUVER**	(31) 16.04.91
12	Damian **LAS**	(20) 11.04.02
31	Andrew **TARBELL**	(28) 07.10.93

DEFENDERS

3	Jhohan **ROMANA** (Col)	(23) 13.09.98
4	Ruben **GABRIELSEN** (Nor)	(30) 10.03.92
15	Kipp **KELLER**	(21) 14.07.00
16	Hector **JIMENEZ**	(33) 03.11.88
18	Julio **CASCANTE** (Crc)	(28) 03.10.93
23	Zan **KOLMANIC** (Svn)	(22) 03.03.00
24	Nick **LIMA**	(27) 17.11.94
26	Carlos **ASENSIO**	(22) 18.01.00

MIDFIELDERS

5	Jhojan **VALENCIA** (Col)	(25) 27.07.96
6	Daniel **PEREIRA** (Ven)	(21) 14.07.00
8	Alex **RING** (Fin)	(31) 09.04.91
13	Ethan **FINLAY**	(31) 06.08.90
14	Diego **FAGUNDEZ** (Uru)	(27) 14.02.95
20	Jared **STROUD**	(25) 10.07.96
22	**FELIPE** (Bra)	(31) 30.09.90
33	Owen **WOLFF**	(17) 30.12.04

FORWARDS

2	Moussa **DJITTE** (Sen)	(22) 04.10.99
7	Sebastian **DRIUSSI** (Arg)	(26) 09.02.96
9	Danny **HOESEN** (Ned)	(31) 15.01.91
10	Cecilio **DOMINGUEZ** (Par)	(27) 11.08.94
11	Rodney **REDES** (Par)	(22) 22.02.00
17	Jon **GALLAGHER** (Irl)	(26) 23.02.96
37	Maxi **URRUTI** (Arg)	(31) 22.02.91

COACH

	Josh **WOLFF**	(45) 25.02.77

CHARLOTTE FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Kristijan **KAHLINA** (Cro)	(29) 24.07.92
23	Pablo **SISNIEGA** (Mex)	(26) 07.07.95
30	Adrian **ZENDEJAS**	(26) 30.08.95
31	George **MARKS**	(22) 10.11.99

DEFENDERS

2	Jan **SOBOCINSKI** (Pol)	(23) 20.03.99
3	Adam **ARMOUR**	(19) 27.09.02
4	Guzman **CORUJO** (Uru)	(25) 02.08.96
5	Anton **WALKES** (Eng)	(25) 08.02.97
14	Christian **MAKOUN** (Ven)	(22) 05.03.00
22	Christian **FUCHS** (Aut)	(36) 07.04.86
24	Jaylin **LINDSEY**	(22) 27.03.00
25	Harrison **AFFUL** (Gha)	(35) 24.07.86
28	Joseph **MORA** (Crc)	(29) 15.01.93
36	Koa **SANTOS**	(22) 21.09.99

MIDFIELDERS

6	Sergio **RUIZ** (Spa)	(27) 16.12.94
8	Jordy **ALCIVAR** (Ecu)	(22) 05.08.99
13	Brandt **BRONICO**	(26) 20.06.95
15	Benjamin **BENDER**	(21) 07.03.01
19	Chris **HEGARDT**	(20) 06.01.02
20	Derrick **JONES**	(25) 03.03.97
21	Alan **FRANCO** (Ecu)	(23) 21.08.98
26	Yordy **REYNA** (Per)	(28) 17.09.93

FORWARDS

9	**VINICIUS MELLO** (Bra)	(19) 19.08.02
10	Christian **ORTIZ** (Arg)	(29) 20.08.92
11	Karol **SWIDERSKI** (Pol)	(25) 23.01.97
12	Daniel **RIOS** (Mex)	(27) 22.02.95
17	McKinze **GAINES**	(24) 02.03.98

COACH

	Miguel **RAMIREZ** (Spa)	(37) 23.10.84

CHICAGO FIRE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Gabriel **SLONINA**	(17) 15.05.04
18	Spencer **RICHEY**	(29) 30.05.92
34	Chris **BRADY**	(18) 02.03.04

DEFENDERS

2	Boris **SEKULIC** (Svk)	(30) 21.10.91
3	Jonathan **BORNSTEIN**	(37) 07.11.84
5	Rafael **CZICHOS** (Ger)	(31) 14.05.90
6	Miguel **NAVARRO** (Ven)	(23) 26.02.99
14	Jhon **ESPINOZA** (Ecu)	(23) 24.02.99
20	Wyatt **OMSBERG**	(26) 21.09.95
22	Mauricio **PINEDA**	(24) 17.10.97
23	Carlos **TERAN** (Col)	(21) 24.09.00
27	Kendall **BURKS**	(22) 08.10.99
36	Andre **REYNOLDS**	(21) 02.05.01

MIDFIELDERS

21	Fabian **HERBERS** (Ger)	(28) 17.08.93
30	Gaston **GIMENEZ** (Par)	(30) 27.07.91
31	Federico **NAVARRO** (Arg)	(22) 09.03.00
35	Sergio **OREGEL**	(16) 16.05.05
37	Javier **CASAS**	(18) 14.05.03
38	Alex **MONIS**	(19) 20.03.03
39	Allan **RODRIGUEZ**	(17) 27.05.04
40	Brian **GUTIERREZ**	(18) 17.06.03
99	Stanislav **IVANOV** (Bul)	(23) 16.04.99

FORWARDS

9	Chinonso **OFFOR** (Nga)	(21) 27.05.00
10	Xherdan **SHAQIRI** (Sui)	(30) 10.10.91
11	Kacper **PRZYBYLKO** (Pol)	(29) 25.03.93
26	Jhon **DURAN** (Col)	(18) 13.12.03
33	Victor **BEZERRA**	(22) 05.02.00

COACH

	Ezra **HENDRICKSON** (Vin)	(50) 16.01.72

FC CINCINNATI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alec **KANN**	(31) 08.08.90
25	Kenneth **VERMEER** (Ned)	(36) 10.01.86
30	Beckham **SUNDERLAND**	(18) 30.06.03

DEFENDERS

2	Alvas **POWELL** (Jam)	(27) 18.07.94
4	Nick **HAGGLUND**	(29) 14.09.92
16	Zico **BAILEY**	(21) 27.08.00
20	Geoff **CAMERON**	(36) 11.07.85
22	Ronald **MATARRITA** (Crc)	(27) 09.07.94
24	Tyler **BLACKETT** (Eng)	(28) 02.04.94
28	Ray **GADDIS**	(32) 13.01.90
32	Ian **MURPHY**	(22) 16.01.00

MIDFIELDERS

6	Haris **MEDUNJANIN** (Bih)	(37) 08.03.85
8	Allan **CRUZ** (Crc)	(26) 24.02.96
10	Luciano **ACOSTA** (Arg)	(27) 31.05.94
31	Alvaro **BARREAL** (Arg)	(21) 17.08.00
35	Harrison **ROBLEDO**	(20) 08.02.02
93	Junior **MORENO** (Ven)	(28) 20.07.93
–	Obinna **NWOBODO** (Nga)	(25) 21.11.96

FORWARDS

7	Yuya **KUBO** (Jpn)	(28) 24.12.93
9	**BRENNER** (Bra)	(22) 16.01.00
12	Calvin **HARRIS** (Eng)	(22) 20.03.00
14	Dom **BADJI** (Sen)	(29) 16.10.92
19	Brandon **VAZQUEZ**	(23) 14.10.98
23	Isaac **ATANGA** (Gha)	(21) 29.07.00
29	Arquimides **ORDONEZ**	(18) 05.08.03
33	Nick **MARKANICH**	(22) 26.12.99

COACH

	Pat **NOONAN**	(41) 02.08.80

Experience...Cincinnati's former Bosnia & Herzegovina international Haris Medunjanin

COLORADO RAPIDS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Clint **IRWIN**	(33) 01.04.89
22	William **YARBROUGH**	(33) 20.03.89
28	Abraham **RODRIGUEZ**	(19) 19.07.02

DEFENDERS

2	Keegan **ROSENBERRY**	(28) 11.12.93
3	Drew **MOOR**	(38) 15.01.84
4	Danny **WILSON** (Sco)	(30) 27.12.91
5	Auston **TRUSTY**	(23) 12.08.98
6	Lalas **ABUBAKAR** (Gha)	(27) 25.12.94
27	Sebastian **ANDERSON**	(19) 08.08.02
31	Anthony **MARKANICH**	(22) 26.12.99
33	Steven **BEITASHOUR** (Irn)	(35) 01.02.87
34	Michael **EDWARDS**	(21) 27.11.00
47	Aboubacar **KEITA**	(22) 06.04.00
66	**LUCAS ESTEVES** (Bra)	(21) 24.06.00

MIDFIELDERS

7	Jonathan **LEWIS**	(24) 04.06.97
8	**MAX** (Bra)	(21) 12.05.01
14	Mark-Anthony **KAYE** (Can)	(27) 02.12.94
16	Philip **MAYAKA** (Ken)	(21) 20.11.00
19	Jack **PRICE** (Eng)	(29) 19.12.92
20	Nicolas **MEZQUIDA** (Uru)	(30) 21.01.92
21	Bryan **ACOSTA** (Hon)	(28) 24.11.93
30	Oliver **LARRAZ**	(20) 16.09.01
32	Collen **WARNER**	(33) 24.06.88
52	Braian **GALVAN** (Arg)	(21) 06.10.00
77	Darren **YAPI**	(17) 19.11.04

FORWARDS

9	Andre **SHINYASHIKI** (Bra)	(24) 11.06.97
11	Diego **RUBIO** (Chi)	(28) 15.05.93
12	Michael **BARRIOS** (Col)	(31) 21.04.91
29	Gyasi **ZARDES**	(30) 02.09.91
37	Dantouma **TOURE**	(17) 12.06.04

COACH

	Robin **FRASER**	(55) 17.12.66

COLUMBUS CREW

GOALKEEPERS

1	Eloy **ROOM** (Cuw)	(33) 06.02.89
24	Evan **BUSH**	(36) 06.03.86
28	Patrick **SCHULTE**	(21) 13.03.01
32	Brady **SCOTT**	(22) 30.06.99

DEFENDERS

3	Josh **WILLIAMS**	(34) 18.04.88
4	Jonathan **MENSAH** (Gha)	(31) 13.07.90
5	Milos **DEGENEK** (Aus)	(28) 28.04.94
17	Marlon **HAIRSTON**	(28) 23.03.94
23	Jalil **ANIBABA**	(33) 19.10.88
30	William **SANDS**	(21) 06.07.00
31	Steven **MOREIRA** (Fra)	(27) 13.08.94

MIDFIELDERS

2	Perry **KITCHEN**	(30) 29.02.92
6	Darlington **NAGBE**	(31) 19.07.90
7	Pedro **SANTOS** (Por)	(34) 22.04.88
8	**ARTUR** (Bra)	(26) 11.03.96
10	Lucas **ZELARAYAN** (Arm)	(29) 20.06.92
12	Luis **DIAZ** (Crc)	(23) 06.12.98
16	Isaiah **PARENTE**	(22) 16.03.00
20	Alexandru **MATAN** (Rou)	(22) 29.08.99
21	Aidan **MORRIS**	(20) 16.11.01
22	Derrick **ETIENNE** (Hai)	(25) 25.11.96
25	Sean **ZAWADZKI**	(22) 21.04.00
26	James **IGBEKEME** (Nga)	(26) 04.07.95
33	Jake **MORRIS**	(23) 03.03.99

FORWARDS

9	Kevin **MOLINO** (Tri)	(31) 17.06.90
14	Yaw **YEBOAH** (Gha)	(25) 28.03.97
19	Erik **HURTADO**	(31) 15.11.90
27	Miguel **BERRY** (Spa)	(24) 16.09.97

COACH

	Caleb **PORTER**	(47) 18.02.75

FC DALLAS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jimmy **MAURER**	(33) 14.10.88
13	Antonio **CARRERA**	(18) 15.03.04
30	Maarten **PAES** (Ned)	(23) 14.05.98

DEFENDERS

2	Eddie **MUNJOMA**	(23) 18.07.98
3	Jose **MARTINEZ** (Spa)	(29) 12.02.93
4	Marco **FARFAN**	(23) 12.11.98
17	Nkosi **BURGESS**	(25) 23.03.97
22	Ema **TWUMASI** (Gha)	(24) 18.05.97
24	Matt **HEDGES**	(32) 01.04.90
25	Collin **SMITH**	(18) 04.12.03
26	Lucas **BARTLETT**	(24) 26.07.97
31	**NANU** (Gnb)	(27) 17.05.94

MIDFIELDERS

5	Facundo **QUIGNON** (Arg)	(29) 02.05.93
6	Edwin **CERRILLO**	(21) 03.10.00
7	Paul **ARRIOLA**	(27) 05.02.95
18	Brandon **SERVANIA**	(23) 12.03.99
19	Paxton **POMYKAL**	(22) 17.12.99
21	Kalil **ELMEDKHAR**	(22) 18.08.99
80	Nicky **HERNANDEZ**	(23) 21.09.98

FORWARDS

8	Jader **OBRIAN** (Col)	(26) 18.05.95
10	Jesus **FERREIRA**	(21) 24.12.00
11	Szabolcs **SCHON** (Hun)	(21) 27.09.00
14	Beni **REDZIC**	(19) 26.09.02
15	Isaiah **PARKER**	(19) 01.09.02
16	Tsiki **NTSABELENG** (Rsa)	(24) 09.02.98
20	Alan **VELASCO** (Arg)	(19) 27.07.02
29	Franco **JARA** (Arg)	(33) 15.07.88

COACH

Nico **ESTEVEZ** (Spa)		(42) 29.01.80

DC UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

21	Jon **KEMPIN**	(29) 08.04.93
28	Bill **HAMID**	(31) 25.11.90

DEFENDERS

2	Gaoussou **SAMAKE** (Civ)	(24) 04.11.97
3	Chris **ODOI-ATSEM**	(26) 27.05.95
4	Brendan **HINES-IKE**	(27) 30.11.94
5	Brad **SMITH** (Aus)	(28) 09.04.94
14	Andy **NAJAR** (Hon)	(29) 16.03.93
15	Steve **BIRNBAUM**	(31) 23.01.91
20	Hayden **SARGIS**	(20) 02.05.02
23	Donovan **PINES**	(24) 07.03.98
33	Jacob **GREENE**	(19) 23.03.03
93	Tony **ALFARO** (Mex)	(28) 15.06.93

MIDFIELDERS

6	Russell **CANOUSE**	(26) 11.06.95
8	Chris **DURKIN**	(22) 08.02.00
10	Edison **FLORES** (Per)	(27) 14.05.94
12	Drew **SKUNDRICH**	(26) 17.09.95
13	Sofiane **DJEFFAL** (Fra)	(23) 19.04.99
18	Jeremy **GARAY**	(19) 01.04.03
27	Moses **NYEMAN**	(18) 05.11.03
31	Julian **GRESSEL** (Ger)	(28) 16.12.93
35	Theodore **KU-DIPIETRO**	(20) 28.01.02

FORWARDS

7	Michael **ESTRADA** (Ecu)	(26) 07.04.96
9	Ola **KAMARA** (Nor)	(32) 15.10.89
16	Adrien **PEREZ**	(26) 13.10.95
17	Kimarni **SMITH** (Eng)	(24) 14.03.98
19	Nigel **ROBERTHA** (Cuw)	(24) 13.02.98
22	Griffin **YOW**	(19) 25.09.02
24	Azaad **LIADI**	(23) 14.05.98

COACH

Chad **ASHTON** *(Interim)*		(54) 26.10.67

HOUSTON DYNAMO

GOALKEEPERS

12	Steve **CLARK**	(36) 14.04.86
26	Michael **NELSON**	(27) 10.02.95

DEFENDERS

2	Daniel **STERES**	(31) 11.11.90
3	Adam **LUNDQVIST** (Swe)	(28) 20.03.94
4	Zarek **VALENTIN** (Pur)	(30) 06.08.91
5	Tim **PARKER**	(29) 23.02.93
13	Ethan **BARTLOW**	(22) 02.02.00
17	Teenage **HADEBE** (Zim)	(26) 17.09.95
29	Sam **JUNQUA**	(25) 09.11.96
37	**ZECA** (Bra)	(27) 16.05.94

MIDFIELDERS

8	Memo **RODRIGUEZ**	(26) 27.12.95
10	Fafa **PICAULT**	(31) 23.02.91
11	Corey **BAIRD**	(26) 30.01.96
20	Adalberto **CARRASQUILLA** (Pan)	(23) 28.11.98
22	Matias **VERA** (Arg)	(26) 26.10.95
24	Darwin **CEREN** (Slv)	(32) 31.12.89
25	Griffin **DORSEY**	(23) 05.03.99
27	Marcelo **PALOMINO**	(20) 21.05.01
30	Ian **HOFFMANN**	(20) 08.09.01
32	Juan **CASTILLO**	(17) 27.07.04
33	Daniel **RIOS** (Slv)	(19) 29.03.03
34	Thorleifur **ULFARSSON** (Isl)	(21) 27.12.00

FORWARDS

9	Sebastian **FERREIRA** (Par)	(24) 13.02.98
19	Tyler **PASHER** (Can)	(28) 27.04.94
23	Carlos **QUINTERO** (Col)	(34) 19.09.87

COACH

Paulo **NAGAMURA** (Bra)		(39) 02.03.83

Hot shot...Houston Dynamo's Carlos Quintero has started the season in electric form

INTER MIAMI

GOALKEEPERS

21	Nick **MARSMAN** (Ned)	(31) 01.10.90
27	Drake **CALLENDER**	(24) 07.10.97
29	C.J. **DOS SANTOS**	(21) 24.08.00
94	Clement **DIOP** (Sen)	(28) 13.10.93

DEFENDERS

2	DeAndre **YEDLIN**	(28) 09.07.93
3	Kieran **GIBBS** (Eng)	(32) 26.09.89
4	Christopher **MCVEY** (Swe)	(25) 12.04.97
12	Aime **MABIKA**	(23) 16.08.98
15	Jairo **QUINTEROS** (Bol)	(21) 07.02.01
24	Ian **FRAY**	(19) 31.08.02
31	Damion **LOWE** (Jam)	(29) 05.05.93
33	Joevin **JONES** (Tri)	(30) 03.08.91
44	Modesto **MENDEZ** (Cub)	(24) 06.01.98

MIDFIELDERS

6	Mo **ADAMS** (Eng)	(25) 23.09.96
7	Jean **MOTA** (Bra)	(28) 15.10.93
8	Blaise **MATUIDI** (Fra)	(35) 09.04.87
13	Victor **ULLOA** (Mex)	(30) 04.03.92
20	Brek **SHEA**	(32) 28.02.90
22	Bryce **DUKE**	(21) 28.02.01
25	Emerson **RODRIGUEZ** (Col)	(21) 25.08.00
26	**GREGORE** (Bra)	(28) 02.03.94
30	George **ACOSTA**	(22) 19.01.00
32	Noah **ALLEN**	(18) 28.04.04

FORWARDS

9	Leonardo **CAMPANA** (Ecu)	(21) 24.07.00
10	Gonzalo **HIGUAIN** (Arg)	(34) 10.12.87
11	Ariel **LASSITER** (Crc)	(27) 27.09.94
16	Robert **TAYLOR** (Fin)	(27) 21.10.94
19	Robbie **ROBINSON**	(23) 17.12.98
25	Felipe **VALENCIA**	(17) 01.03.05
28	Edison **AZCONA** (Dom)	(18) 21.11.03

COACH

Phil **NEVILLE** (Eng)		(45) 21.01.77

LA GALAXY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jonathan **BOND** (Eng)	(28) 19.05.93
12	Eric **LOPEZ**	(23) 05.03.99
21	Richard **SANCHEZ** (Mex)	(28) 05.04.94
33	Jonathan **KLINSMANN**	(25) 08.04.97

DEFENDERS

2	Julian **ARAUJO**	(20) 13.08.01
3	Derrick **WILLIAMS** (Irl)	(29) 17.01.93
4	Sega **COULIBALY** (Fra)	(25) 09.06.96
15	Eriq **ZAVALETA** (Slv)	(29) 02.08.92
18	Kelvin **LEERDAM** (Sur)	(31) 24.06.90
19	Jorge **VILLAFANA**	(32) 16.09.89
20	Nick **DEPUY**	(27) 14.11.94
24	Jalen **NEAL**	(18) 24.08.03
74	Marcus **FERKRANUS**	(19) 10.05.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Rayan **RAVELOSON** (Mad)	(25) 16.01.97
7	Victor **VAZQUEZ** (Spa)	(35) 20.01.87
8	Marky **DELGADO**	(26) 16.05.95
16	Sacha **KLJESTAN**	(36) 09.09.85
26	Efrain **ALVAREZ** (Mex)	(19) 19.06.02
37	Daniel **AGUIRRE**	(22) 28.07.99
43	Adam **SALDANA**	(20) 07.02.02
56	Jonathan **PEREZ** (Mex)	(19) 18.01.03
67	Carlos **HARVEY** (Pan)	(22) 03.02.00

FORWARDS

9	Kevin **CABRAL** (Fra)	(22) 10.07.99
10	**DOUGLAS COSTA** (Bra)	(31) 14.09.90
11	Samuel **GRANDSIR** (Fra)	(25) 14.08.96
14	Javier **HERNANDEZ** (Mex)	(33) 01.06.88
25	Cameron **DUNBAR**	(19) 22.10.02
44	Raheem **EDWARDS** (Can)	(26) 17.07.95
99	Dejan **JOVELJIC** (Srb)	(22) 07.08.99

COACH

Greg **VANNEY**		(47) 11.06.74

LOS ANGELES FC

GOALKEEPERS

16	Maxime **CREPEAU** (Can)	(28) 11.05.94
30	Tomas **ROMERO** (Slv)	(21) 19.12.00
77	John **MCCARTHY**	(29) 04.07.92

DEFENDERS

2	Franco **ESCOBAR** (Arg)	(27) 21.02.95
3	Jesus **MURILLO** (Col)	(28) 18.02.94
4	Eddie **SEGURA** (Col)	(25) 02.02.97
5	Mamadou **FALL** (Sen)	(19) 21.11.02
12	Diego **PALACIOS** (Ecu)	(22) 12.07.99
24	Ryan **HOLLINGSHEAD**	(31) 16.04.91
25	Sebastien **IBEAGHA**	(30) 21.01.92
28	Antonio **LEONE** (Mex)	(18) 28.04.04
44	Doneil **HENRY** (Can)	(29) 20.04.93
80	Julian **GAINES**	(19) 05.11.02

MIDFIELDERS

6	**ILIE** Sanchez (Spa)	(31) 21.11.90
8	Francisco **GINELLA** (Uru)	(23) 21.01.99
11	Jose **CIFUENTES** (Ecu)	(23) 12.03.99
17	Brian **RODRIGUEZ** (Uru)	(21) 20.05.00
23	Kellyn **ACOSTA**	(26) 24.07.95

FORWARDS

7	Latif **BLESSING** (Gha)	(25) 30.12.96
9	Cristian **ARANGO** (Col)	(27) 09.03.95
10	Carlos **VELA** (Mex)	(33) 01.03.89
19	Ismael **TAJOURI-SHRADI** (Lby)	(28) 28.03.94
21	Christian **TORRES** (Mex)	(18) 15.04.04
22	Kwadwo **OPOKU** (Gha)	(20) 13.07.01
26	Cal **JENNINGS**	(24) 17.05.97
29	Danny **MUSOVSKI**	(26) 30.11.95

COACH

Steven **CHERUNDOLO**		(43) 19.02.79

MINNESOTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Tyler **MILLER**	(29) 12.03.93
97	Dayne **ST. CLAIR** (Can)	(25) 09.05.97
99	Fred **EMMINGS** (Lux)	(18) 08.02.04

DEFENDERS

4	Callum **MONTGOMERY** (Can)	(24) 14.05.97
12	Bakaye **DIBASSY** (Mali)	(32) 11.08.89
14	Brent **KALLMAN**	(31) 04.10.90
15	Michael **BOXALL** (Nzl)	(33) 18.08.88
19	Romain **METANIRE** (Mad)	(32) 28.03.90
27	D.J. **TAYLOR**	(24) 26.08.97
36	Nabi **KIBUNGUCHY**	(24) 05.01.98
77	Chase **GASPER**	(26) 25.01.96
91	Oniel **FISHER** (Jam)	(30) 22.11.91
92	Kemar **LAWRENCE** (Jam)	(29) 17.09.92

MIDFIELDERS

5	Jacori **HAYES**	(26) 28.06.95
7	Franco **FRAGAPANE** (Arg)	(28) 02.06.93
8	Joseph **ROSALES** (Hon)	(21) 06.11.00
10	Emanuel **REYNOSO** (Arg)	(26) 16.11.95
11	Niko **HANSEN** (Den)	(27) 14.09.94
17	Robin **LOD** (Fin)	(29) 17.04.93
20	Wil **TRAPP**	(29) 15.01.93
24	Justin **MCMASTER** (Jam)	(22) 30.06.99
25	Aziel **JACKSON**	(20) 25.10.01
31	Hassani **DOTSON**	(24) 06.08.97
33	Kervin **ARRIAGA** (Hon)	(24) 05.01.98

FORWARDS

9	Luis **AMARILLA** (Par)	(26) 25.08.95
18	Abu **DANLADI** (Gha)	(26) 18.10.95
21	Bongokuhle **HLONGWANE** (Rsa)	(21) 20.06.00
23	Adrien **HUNOU** (Fra)	(28) 19.01.94
29	Patrick **WEAH**	(18) 05.12.03

COACH

Adrian **HEATH** (Eng)		(61) 11.01.61

(ages as of 13.05.22)

USA: MLS 2022

CF MONTREAL

GOALKEEPERS

1	Sebastian **BREZA** (Can)	(24) 15.03.98
25	Logan **KETTERER**	(28) 09.11.93
40	Jonathan **SIROIS** (Can)	
41	James **PANTEMIS** (Can)	(25) 21.02.97

DEFENDERS

3	Kamal **MILLER** (Can)	(24) 16.05.97
4	Rudy **CAMACHO** (Fra)	(31) 05.03.91
5	Gabriele **CORBO** (Ita)	(22) 11.01.00
15	Zachary **BRAULT** (Can)	(23) 30.12.98
16	Joel **WATERMAN** (Can)	(26) 24.01.96
19	Zorhan **BASSONG** (Can)	(23) 07.05.99
22	Alistair **JOHNSTON** (Can)	(23) 08.10.98
24	Karifa **YAO** (Can)	(21) 28.09.00
26	Robert **THORKELSSON** (Isl)	(20) 03.04.02
33	Keesean **FERDINAND** (Can)	(18) 17.08.03

MIDFIELDERS

2	Victor **WANYAMA** (Ken)	(30) 25.06.91
6	Samuel **PIETTE** (Can)	(27) 12.11.94
7	Ahmed **HAMDI** (Egy)	(24) 10.02.98
8	Djordje **MIHAILOVIC**	(23) 10.11.98
10	Joaquin **TORRES** (Arg)	(25) 28.01.97
11	Matko **MILJEVIC**	(21) 09.05.01
18	Rida **ZOUHIR** (Can)	(18) 23.11.03
21	Lassi **LAPPALAINEN** (Fin)	(23) 24.08.98
28	Ismael **KONE** (Civ)	(19) 06.06.02
29	Mathieu **CHOINIERE** (Can)	(23) 07.02.99
30	Romell **QUIOTO** (Hon)	(30) 09.08.91
34	Tomas **GIRALDO** (Can)	(19) 08.03.03
35	Jean-Aniel **ASSI** (Can)	(17) 12.08.04
36	Nathan-Dylan **SALIBA** (Can)	(18) 07.02.04

FORWARDS

9	Bjorn **JOHNSEN** (Nor)	(30) 06.11.91
13	Mason **TOYE**	(23) 16.10.98
14	Ibrahim **SUNUSI** (Nga)	(19) 01.10.02
23	Kei **KAMARA** (Sle)	(37) 01.09.84

COACH

	Wilfried **NANCY** (Fra)	(45) 09.04.77

Ex-Premier League star...Kenya midfielder Victor Wanyama in action for CF Montreal

NASHVILLE SC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Joe **WILLIS**	(33) 10.08.88
32	Will **MEYER**	(23) 24.05.98
35	Bryan **MEREDITH**	(32) 02.08.89

DEFENDERS

2	Daniel **LOVITZ**	(30) 27.08.91
4	Dave **ROMNEY**	(28) 12.06.93
5	Jack **MAHER**	(22) 28.10.99
15	Eric **MILLER**	(29) 15.01.93
21	Ahmed **LONGMIRE**	(22) 11.10.99
22	Josh **BAUER**	(23) 22.07.98
23	Taylor **WASHINGTON**	(28) 16.08.93
25	Walker **ZIMMERMAN**	(28) 19.05.93

MIDFIELDERS

6	Dax **MCCARTY**	(35) 30.04.87
8	Randall **LEAL** (Crc)	(25) 14.01.97
10	Hany **MUKHTAR** (Ger)	(27) 21.03.95
13	Irakoze **DONASIYANO**	(24) 03.02.98
19	Alex **MUYL**	(26) 30.09.95
20	Anibal **GODOY** (Pan)	(32) 10.02.90
26	Luke **HAAKENSON**	(24) 10.09.97
27	Brian **ANUNGA** (Cmr)	(25) 10.08.96
54	Sean **DAVIS**	(29) 08.02.93

FORWARDS

7	Handwalla **BWANA** (Ken)	(22) 25.06.99
9	Ake **LOBA** (Civ)	(24) 01.04.98
11	Ethan **ZUBAK**	(24) 15.04.98
12	Teal **BUNBURY**	(32) 27.02.90
17	C.J. **SAPONG**	(33) 27.12.88

COACH

	Gary **SMITH** (Eng)	(53) 12.03.68

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

GOALKEEPERS

18	Brad **KNIGHTON**	(37) 06.02.85
30	Matt **TURNER**	(27) 24.06.94
36	Earl **EDWARDS JR.**	(30) 24.01.92
98	Jacob **JACKSON**	(22) 25.04.00

DEFENDERS

2	Andrew **FARRELL**	(30) 02.04.92
3	Omar **GONZALEZ**	(33) 11.10.88
4	Henry **KESSLER**	(23) 25.06.98
15	Brandon **BYE**	(26) 29.11.95
23	Jon **BELL**	(24) 26.08.97
24	DeJuan **JONES**	(24) 24.06.97
28	A.J. **DELAGARZA** (Gum)	(34) 04.11.87

MIDFIELDERS

5	Wilfrid **KAPTOUM** (Cmr)	(25) 07.07.96
8	Matt **POLSTER**	(28) 08.06.93
10	Carles **GIL** (Spa)	(29) 22.11.92
11	Emmanuel **BOATENG** (Gha)	(28) 17.01.94
13	**MACIEL** (Bra)	(22) 18.01.00
17	Sebastian **LLETGET**	(29) 03.09.92
25	Arnor **TRAUSTASON** (Isl)	(29) 30.04.93
26	Tommy **MCNAMARA**	(31) 06.02.91
29	Noel **BUCK**	(17) 05.04.05
72	Damian **RIVERA**	(19) 08.12.02
–	Dylan **BORRERO** (Col)	(20) 05.01.02

FORWARDS

7	Gustavo **BOU** (Arg)	(32) 18.02.90
9	Adam **BUKSA** (Pol)	(25) 12.07.96
12	Justin **RENNICKS**	(23) 20.03.99
14	Jozy **ALTIDORE**	(32) 06.11.89

COACH

	Bruce **ARENA**	(70) 21.09.51

NEW YORK CITY FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Sean **JOHNSON**	(32) 31.05.89
13	Luis **BARRAZA**	(25) 08.11.96
25	Cody **MIZELL**	(30) 30.09.91

DEFENDERS

2	Chris **GLOSTER**	(21) 28.07.00
3	Anton **TINNERHOLM** (Swe)	(31) 26.02.91
4	Maxime **CHANOT** (Lux)	(32) 21.11.89
5	**THIAGO MARTINS** (Bra)	(27) 17.03.95
6	Alexander **CALLENS** (Per)	(30) 04.05.92
12	Malte **AMUNDSEN** (Den)	(24) 11.02.98
18	Christian **MCFARLANE** (Eng)	(15) 25.01.07
22	Kevin **O'TOOLE**	(23) 14.12.98
24	Tayvon **GRAY**	(19) 19.08.02
30	Samuel **OWUSU** (Gha)	(21) 13.12.00
32	Vuk **LATINOVICH**	(24) 14.09.97
33	Nico **BENALCAZAR**	(20) 06.06.01

MIDFIELDERS

7	Alfredo **MORALES**	(32) 12.05.90
10	Maximiliano **MORALEZ** (Arg)	(35) 27.02.87
20	Santiago **RODRIGUEZ** (Uru)	(22) 08.01.00
23	Gedion **ZELALEM**	(25) 26.01.97
26	Nicolas **ACEVEDO** (Uru)	(23) 14.04.99
55	Keaton **PARKS**	(24) 06.08.97
80	Justin **HAAK**	(20) 12.09.01

FORWARDS

8	**THIAGO ANDRADE** (Bra)	(21) 31.10.00
9	**HEBER** (Bra)	(30) 10.08.91
11	Valentin **CASTELLANOS** (Arg)	(23) 03.10.98
21	Andres **JASSON**	(20) 17.01.02
27	Jonathan **JIMENEZ** (Mex)	(21) 25.04.01
38	**GABRIEL PEREIRA** (Bra)	(20) 01.08.01
43	**TALLES MAGNO** (Bra)	(19) 26.06.02

COACH

	Ronny **DEILA** (Nor)	(46) 21.09.75

NEW YORK RED BULLS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Carlos **CORONEL** (Bra)	(25) 29.12.96
18	Ryan **MEARA**	(31) 15.11.90
40	A.J. **MARCUCCI**	(22) 31.07.99

DEFENDERS

2	Lucas **MONZON** (Uru)	(20) 29.09.01
4	Andres **REYES** (Col)	(22) 08.09.99
7	Tom **EDWARDS** (Eng)	(23) 22.01.99
12	Dylan **NEALIS**	(23) 30.07.98
15	Sean **NEALIS**	(25) 13.01.97
24	Jason **PENDANT** (Fra)	(25) 09.02.97
33	Aaron **LONG**	(29) 12.10.92
47	John **TOLKIN**	(19) 31.07.02

MIDFIELDERS

8	Frankie **AMAYA**	(21) 26.09.00
10	Lewis **MORGAN** (Sco)	(25) 30.09.96
16	Dru **YEARWOOD** (Eng)	(22) 17.02.00
19	Wikelmann **CARMONA** (Ven)	(19) 24.02.03
21	Omir **FERNANDEZ**	(23) 08.02.99
37	Caden **CLARK**	(18) 27.05.03
75	Daniel **EDELMAN**	(19) 28.04.03
82	**LUQUINHAS** (Bra)	(25) 28.09.96
91	Bento **ESTRELA**	(16) 10.02.06

FORWARDS

9	Patryk **KLIMALA** (Pol)	(23) 05.08.98
11	Ashley **FLETCHER** (Eng)	(26) 02.10.95
17	Cameron **HARPER**	(20) 19.11.01
22	Serge **NGOMA**	(16) 09.07.05
23	Cristian **CASSERES JR.** (Ven)	(22) 20.01.00
28	Zach **RYAN**	(23) 14.01.99
74	Tom **BARLOW**	(26) 08.07.95

COACH

	Gerhard **STRUBER** (Aut)	(45) 24.01.77

ORLANDO CITY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Pedro **GALLESE** (Per)	(32) 23.02.90
31	Mason **STAJDUHAR**	(24) 02.12.97
40	Adam **GRINWIS**	(30) 21.04.92

DEFENDERS

2	**RUAN** (Bra)	(26) 29.05.95
4	Joao **MOUTINHO** (Por)	(24) 12.01.98
6	Robin **JANSSON** (Swe)	(30) 15.11.91
15	Rodrigo **SCHLEGEL** (Arg)	(25) 03.04.97
24	Kyle **SMITH**	(30) 09.01.92
25	**ANTONIO CARLOS** (Bra)	(29) 07.03.93
26	Michael **HALLIDAY**	(19) 22.01.03
68	Thomas **WILLIAMS**	(17) 15.08.04

MIDFIELDERS

5	Cesar **ARAUJO** (Uru)	(21) 02.04.01
8	Jhegson **MENDEZ** (Ecu)	(25) 26.04.97
10	Mauricio **PEREYRA** (Uru)	(32) 15.03.90
11	**JUNIOR URSO** (Bra)	(33) 10.03.89
17	Facundo **TORRES** (Uru)	(22) 13.04.00
21	Andres **PEREA**	(21) 14.11.00
32	Wilfredo **RIVERA** (Pur)	(18) 14.10.03
34	Joey **DEZART** (Jam)	(23) 09.06.98

FORWARDS

7	Alexandre **PATO** (Bra)	(32) 02.09.89
9	Ercan **KARA** (Aut)	(26) 03.01.96
13	Tesho **AKINDELE** (Can)	(30) 31.03.92
14	Silvester **VAN DER WATER** (Ned)	(25) 30.09.96
19	Benji **MICHEL**	(24) 23.10.97
27	Jack **LYNN**	(22) 12.01.00

COACH

	Oscar **PAREJA** (Col)	(53) 10.08.68

PHILADELPHIA UNION

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matt **FREESE**	(23) 02.09.98
12	Joe **BENDIK**	(33) 25.04.89
18	Andre **BLAKE** (Jam)	(31) 21.11.90

DEFENDERS

2	Matt **REAL**	(22) 10.07.99
3	Jack **ELLIOTT** (Eng)	(26) 24.08.95
4	Stuart **FINDLAY** (Sco)	(26) 14.09.95
5	Jacob **GLESNES** (Nor)	(28) 25.03.94
15	Olivier **MBAIZO** (Cmr)	(24) 15.08.97
24	Anthony **SORENSON**	(19) 25.01.03
26	Nathan **HARRIEL**	(21) 23.04.01
27	Kai **WAGNER** (Ger)	(25) 15.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

6	Daniel **GAZDAG** (Hun)	(26) 02.03.96
8	Jose **MARTINEZ** (Ven)	(27) 07.08.94
11	Alejandro **BEDOYA**	(35) 29.04.87
13	Cole **TURNER**	(20) 07.07.01
16	Jack **MCGLYNN**	(18) 07.07.03
20	Jesus **BUENO** (Ven)	(23) 15.04.99
30	Paxten **AARONSON**	(18) 26.08.03
31	Leon **FLACH**	(21) 28.02.01
33	Quinn **SULLIVAN**	(18) 27.03.04
34	Brandan **CRAIG**	(18) 07.04.04

FORWARDS

7	Mikkel **UHRE** (Den)	(27) 30.09.94
9	Julian **CARRANZA** (Arg)	(21) 22.05.00
17	**SERGIO SANTOS** (Bra)	(27) 04.09.94
19	Cory **BURKE** (Jam)	(30) 28.12.91

COACH

	Jim **CURTIN**	(42) 23.06.79

PORTLAND TIMBERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	David **BINGHAM**	(32) 19.10.89
26	Hunter **SULTE**	(20) 25.04.02
31	Aljaz **IVACIC** (Svn)	(28) 29.12.93
41	Justin **VOM STEEG**	(25) 05.04.97

DEFENDERS

2	Josecarlos **VAN RANKIN** (Mex)	(28) 14.05.93
5	Claudio **BRAVO** (Arg)	(25) 13.03.97
13	Dario **ZUPARIC** (Cro)	(30) 03.05.92
18	Zac **MCGRAW**	(24) 08.06.97
25	Bill **TUILOMA** (Nzl)	(27) 27.03.95
28	Pablo **BONILLA** (Ven)	(22) 02.12.99
33	Larrys **MABIALA** (Cod)	(34) 08.10.87

MIDFIELDERS

10	Sebastian **BLANCO** (Arg)	(34) 15.03.88
14	Justin **RASMUSSEN**	(23) 15.12.98
19	Eryk **WILLIAMSON**	(24) 11.06.97
20	George **FOCHIVE**	(30) 24.03.92
21	Diego **CHARA** (Col)	(36) 05.04.86
22	Cristhian **PAREDES** (Par)	(23) 18.05.98
23	Yimmi **CHARA** (Col)	(31) 02.04.91
24	David **AYALA** (Arg)	(19) 26.07.02
27	Dairon **ASPRILLA** (Col)	(29) 25.05.92
30	Santiago **MORENO** (Col)	(22) 21.04.00
44	Marvin **LORIA** (Crc)	(25) 24.04.97
98	Blake **BODILY**	(24) 13.01.98

FORWARDS

9	Felipe **MORA** (Chi)	(28) 02.08.93
11	Jaroslaw **NIEZGODA** (Pol)	(27) 15.03.95
16	Diego **GUTIERREZ**	(23) 05.01.99

COACH

	Giovanni **SAVARESE** (Ven)	(50) 14.07.71

REAL SALT LAKE

GOALKEEPERS

1	David **OCHOA**	(21) 16.01.01
18	Zac **MACMATH**	(30) 07.08.91
24	Jeffrey **DEWSNUP**	(17) 21.05.04
35	Gavin **BEAVERS**	(17) 29.04.05
81	Tomas **GOMEZ**	(28) 20.05.93

DEFENDERS

2	Andrew **BRODY**	(27) 03.05.95
4	Johan **KAPPELHOF** (Ned)	(31) 05.08.90
15	Justen **GLAD**	(25) 28.02.97
20	Erik **HOLT**	(25) 06.09.96
21	Tate **SCHMITT**	(24) 28.05.97
22	Aaron **HERRERA**	(24) 06.06.97
28	Jasper **LOFFELSEND** (Ger)	(24) 10.09.97
30	Marcelo **SILVA** (Uru)	(33) 21.03.89
32	Zackery **FARNSWORTH**	(19) 13.07.02
44	Kurowskybob **PIERRE** (Hai)	(19) 28.08.02
99	Jaziel **OROZCO**	(17) 02.06.04

MIDFIELDERS

6	Pablo **RUIZ** (Arg)	(23) 20.12.98
8	Damir **KREILACH** (Cro)	(33) 16.04.89
12	Scott **CALDWELL**	(31) 15.03.91
13	Nick **BESLER**	(29) 07.05.93
16	Maikel **CHANG** (Cub)	(31) 18.04.91
25	**EVERTON LUIZ** (Bra)	(33) 24.05.88
27	Jonathan **MENENDEZ** (Arg)	(28) 05.03.94
33	Julio **BENITEZ**	(16) 30.07.05
42	Pierre **REEDY**	(24) 11.01.98

FORWARDS

7	Bobby **WOOD**	(29) 15.11.92
9	Justin **MERAM** (Irq)	(33) 04.12.88
10	Sergio **CORDOVA** (Ven)	(24) 09.08.97
14	Rubio **RUBIN**	(26) 01.03.96
17	Christopher **GARCIA**	(19) 13.01.03
19	Bode **DAVIS**	(20) 22.02.02
31	Axel **KEI**	(14) 30.12.07

COACH

	Pablo **MASTROENI**	(45) 29.08.76

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

GOALKEEPERS

1	J.T. **MARCINKOWSKI**	(25) 09.05.97
12	Matt **BERSANO**	(29) 10.09.92
41	Emmanuel **OCHOA**	(17) 05.05.05

DEFENDERS

13	**NATHAN** (Bra)	(27) 13.05.95
15	Tanner **BEASON**	(25) 23.03.97
23	Oskar **AGREN** (Swe)	(23) 10.09.98
27	Marcos **LOPEZ** (Per)	(22) 20.11.99
77	Casey **WALLS**	(18) 01.10.03
80	Francisco **CALVO** (Crc)	(29) 08.07.92

MIDFIELDERS

3	Paul **MARIE** (Fra)	(27) 24.03.95
5	Eric **REMEDI** (Arg)	(26) 04.06.95
6	Shea **SALINAS**	(35) 24.06.86
9	Javier **LOPEZ** (Mex)	(27) 17.09.94
10	Cristian **ESPINOZA** (Arg)	(27) 03.04.95
14	Jackson **YUEILL**	(25) 19.03.97
16	Jack **SKAHAN**	(24) 07.02.98
17	Jan **GREGUS** (Svk)	(31) 29.01.91
18	George **ASOMANI** (Gha)	(23) 26.03.99
19	Siad **HAJI** (Som)	(22) 01.12.99
21	Gilbert **FUENTES**	(20) 21.02.02
22	Tommy **THOMPSON**	(26) 15.08.95
30	Niko **TSAKIRIS**	(16) 19.06.05
35	Jamiro **MONTEIRO** (Cpv)	(28) 23.11.93
44	Cade **COWELL**	(18) 14.10.03
93	**JUDSON** (Bra)	(28) 25.05.93

FORWARDS

11	Jeremy **EBOBISSE**	(25) 14.02.97
20	William **RICHMOND**	(22) 06.04.00
25	Ousseni **BOUDA** (Bfa)	(22) 28.04.00
28	Benji **KIKANOVIC**	(22) 06.01.00

COACH

	Alex **COVELO** (Spa) *(Interim)*	(43) 19.05.78

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

GOALKEEPERS

24	Stefan **FREI** (Sui)	(36) 20.04.86
26	Andrew **THOMAS** (Eng)	(23) 01.09.98
30	Stefan **CLEVELAND**	(27) 24.05.94

DEFENDERS

3	Xavier **ARREAGA** (Ecu)	(27) 28.09.94
5	Nouhou **TOLO** (Cmr)	(24) 23.06.97
25	Jackson **RAGEN**	(23) 24.09.98
28	Yeimar **GOMEZ** (Col)	(29) 30.06.92
82	Joe **HAFFERTY**	(24) 21.03.98
92	Abdoulaye **CISSOKO** (Fra)	(22) 27.12.99
94	Jimmy **MEDRANDA** (Col)	(28) 07.02.94

MIDFIELDERS

6	**JOAO PAULO** (Bra)	(31) 08.03.91
7	Cristian **ROLDAN**	(26) 03.06.95
10	Nicolas **LODEIRO** (Uru)	(33) 21.03.89
11	Albert **RUSNAK** (Svk)	(27) 07.07.94
16	Alex **ROLDAN**	(25) 28.07.96
21	Reed **BAKER-WHITING**	(17) 31.03.05
22	Kelyn **ROWE**	(30) 02.12.91
73	Obed **VARGAS**	(16) 05.08.05
75	Danny **LEYVA**	(19) 05.05.03
84	Josh **ATENCIO**	(20) 31.01.02
99	Dylan **TEVES**	(22) 04.05.00

FORWARDS

9	Raul **RUIDIAZ** (Per)	(31) 25.07.90
12	Fredy **MONTERO** (Col)	(34) 26.07.87
13	Jordan **MORRIS**	(27) 26.10.94
14	Samuel **ADENIRAN**	(23) 30.09.98
17	Will **BRUIN**	(32) 24.10.89
23	**LEO CHU** (Bra)	(22) 06.04.00
87	Alfonso **OCAMPO-CHAVEZ**	(20) 25.03.02

COACH

	Brian **SCHMETZER**	(59) 18.08.62

SPORTING KANSAS CITY

GOALKEEPERS

1	John **PULSKAMP**	(21) 19.04.01
22	Kendall **MCINTOSH**	(28) 24.01.94
29	Tim **MELIA**	(35) 15.05.86

DEFENDERS

2	Ben **SWEAT**	(30) 04.09.91
3	Andreu **FONTAS** (Spa)	(32) 14.11.89
4	Robert **VOLODER** (Ger)	(21) 09.05.01
5	Nicolas **ISIMAT-MIRIN** (Fra)	(30) 15.11.91
8	Graham **ZUSI**	(35) 18.08.86
12	Kortne **FORD**	(26) 26.01.96
18	Logan **NDENBE** (Bel)	(22) 09.02.00
24	Kayden **PIERRE**	(19) 16.02.03
48	Kaveh **RAD**	(20) 13.06.01

MIDFIELDERS

6	Oriol **ROSELL** (Spa)	(29) 07.07.92
10	Gadi **KINDA** (Isr)	(27) 17.05.94
15	Roger **ESPINOZA** (Hon)	(35) 25.10.86
17	Jake **DAVIS**	(20) 03.01.02
21	Felipe **HERNANDEZ**	(23) 08.06.98
28	Cameron **DUKE**	(21) 13.02.01
32	Jose **MAURI** (Ita)	(25) 16.05.96
54	Remi **WALTER** (Fra)	(27) 26.04.95

FORWARDS

7	Johnny **RUSSELL** (Sco)	(32) 08.04.90
9	Alan **PULIDO** (Mex)	(31) 08.03.91
11	Khiry **SHELTON**	(28) 26.06.93
19	Nikola **VUJNOVIC** (Mne)	(25) 11.01.97
20	Daniel **SALLOI** (Hun)	(25) 19.07.96
25	Osvaldo **CISNEROS**	(18) 13.03.04
27	Marinos **TZIONIS** (Cyp)	(20) 16.07.01

COACH

	Peter **VERMES**	(55) 21.11.66

TORONTO FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Greg **RANJITSINGH** (Tri)	(28) 18.07.93
16	Quentin **WESTBERG**	(36) 25.04.86
25	Alex **BONO**	(28) 25.04.94

DEFENDERS

3	Carlos **SALCEDO** (Mex)	(28) 29.09.93
5	Lukas **MACNAUGHTON**	(27) 08.03.95
12	Kadin **CHUNG** (Can)	(23) 05.09.98
23	Chris **MAVINGA** (Cod)	(30) 26.05.91
27	Shane **O'NEILL**	(28) 02.09.93
38	Luca **PETRASSO** (Can)	(21) 16.06.00

MIDFIELDERS

4	Michael **BRADLEY**	(34) 31.07.87
7	Jahkeele **MARSHALL-RUTTY** (Can)	(17) 16.06.04
8	Ralph **PRISO** (Can)	(19) 02.08.02
10	Alejandro **POZUELO** (Spa)	(30) 20.09.91
14	Noble **OKELLO** (Can)	(21) 20.07.00
21	Jonathan **OSORIO** (Can)	(29) 12.06.92
29	Deandre **KERR** (Can)	(19) 29.11.02
47	Kosi **THOMPSON** (Can)	(19) 27.01.03
58	Kobe **FRANKLIN** (Can)	(19) 10.05.03

FORWARDS

9	Jesus **JIMENEZ** (Spa)	(28) 05.11.93
11	Jayden **NELSON** (Can)	(19) 26.09.02
20	Ayo **AKINOLA** (Can)	(22) 20.01.00
22	Jacob **SHAFFELBURG** (Can)	(22) 26.11.99
77	Jordan **PERRUZZA** (Can)	(21) 16.01.01
99	Ifunanyachi **ACHARA** (Nga)	(24) 28.09.97

COACH

	Bob **BRADLEY**	(64) 03.03.58

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Thomas **HASAL** (Can)	(22) 09.07.99
55	Cody **CROPPER**	(29) 16.02.93
60	Isaac **BOEHMER** (Can)	(20) 20.11.01

DEFENDERS

2	Marcus **GODINHO** (Can)	(24) 28.06.97
3	Cristian **GUTIERREZ** (Chi)	(25) 18.02.97
4	Ranko **VESELINOVIC** (Srb)	(23) 24.03.99
6	Tristan **BLACKMON**	(25) 12.08.96
22	Erik **GODOY** (Arg)	(28) 16.08.93
23	Javain **BROWN** (Jam)	(23) 09.03.99
26	Florian **JUNGWIRTH** (Ger)	(33) 27.01.89
28	Jake **NERWINSKI**	(27) 17.10.94
61	Matteo **CAMPAGNA** (Can)	(17) 04.06.04

MIDFIELDERS

8	**CAIO ALEXANDRE** (Bra)	(23) 24.02.99
16	Sebastian **BERHALTER**	(21) 10.05.01
17	Leonard **OWUSU** (Gha)	(24) 03.06.97
25	Ryan **GAULD** (Sco)	(26) 16.12.95
27	Ryan **RAPOSO** (Can)	(23) 05.03.99
31	Russell **TEIBERT** (Can)	(29) 22.12.92
33	Michael **BALDISIMO** (Can)	(22) 13.04.00
49	Emiliano **BRIENZA** (Can)	(20) 09.05.02

FORWARDS

7	Deiber **CAICEDO** (Col)	(22) 25.03.00
9	Lucas **CAVALLINI** (Can)	(29) 28.12.92
11	Cristian **DAJOME** (Col)	(28) 03.01.94
24	Brian **WHITE**	(26) 03.02.96
45	Pedro **VITE** (Ecu)	(20) 09.03.02
87	Tosaint **RICKETTS** (Can)	(34) 06.08.87

COACH

	Vanni **SARTINI** (Ita)	(45) 14.11.76

Star performer...Scot Ryan Gauld has continued his sparking Farense form in MLS

(ages as of 13.05.22)

AUSTRALIA: A-LEAGUE MEN 2021-22

ADELAIDE UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	James **DELIANOV**	(22) 20.10.99
40	Ethan **COX**	(18) 07.01.04
46	Joe **GAUCI**	(21) 04.07.00
50	Steven **HALL**	(17) 16.01.05

DEFENDERS

3	George **TIMOTHEOU**	(24) 29.07.97
4	Nick **ANSELL**	(28) 02.02.94
7	Ryan **KITTO**	(27) 09.08.94
21	Javi **LOPEZ** (Spa)	(36) 21.01.86
22	Michael **JAKOBSEN** (Den)	(36) 02.01.86
23	Jacob **TRATT**	(27) 14.09.94
25	Lachlan **BARR**	(27) 24.09.94
41	Alexandar **POPOVIC**	(19) 07.09.02
44	Arbi **MOLLAS**	(19) 12.03.03

MIDFIELDERS

6	Louis **D'ARRIGO**	(20) 23.09.01
10	Isaias **SANCHEZ**	(35) 09.02.87
16	Nathan **KONSTANDOPOULOS**	(25) 26.06.96
18	Joe **CALETTI**	(23) 14.09.98
20	Zach **CLOUGH** (Eng)	(27) 08.03.95
27	Joshua **CAVALLO**	(22) 13.11.99
28	**JUANDE** (Spa)	(35) 12.06.86
31	Bernado **OLIVEIRA**	(18) 16.03.04
37	Johnny **YULL**	(17) 05.03.05
55	Ethan **ALAGICH**	(18) 18.12.03
77	Lachlan **BROOK**	(21) 08.02.01

FORWARDS

9	Kusini **YENGI**	(23) 15.01.99
11	Craig **GOODWIN**	(30) 16.12.91
14	George **BLACKWOOD**	(25) 06.04.97
15	Hiroshi **IBUSUKI** (Jpn)	(31) 27.02.91
17	Mohamed **TOURE**	(18) 26.03.04
19	Yaya **DUKULY**	(19) 17.01.03
47	Asad **KASUMOVIC**	(20) 25.08.01
66	Nestor **IRANKUNDA**	(16) 09.02.06

COACH

Carl **VEART**	(51) 21.05.70

BRISBANE ROAR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Macklin **FREKE**	(23) 06.01.99
12	Jordan **HOLMES**	(25) 08.05.97
31	Nicholas **O'CONNELL**	(21) 24.01.01

DEFENDERS

2	Scott **NEVILLE**	(33) 11.01.89
3	Corey **BROWN**	(28) 07.01.94
4	Anton **MLINARIC**	(20) 11.03.02
5	Tom **ALDRED** (Sco)	(31) 11.09.90
16	Josh **BRINDELL-SOUTH**	(29) 28.10.92
17	Alec **MILLS**	(22) 20.04.00
19	Jack **HINGERT**	(31) 26.09.90
27	Kai **TREWIN**	(20) 18.05.01
28	Izaack **POWELL**	(20) 12.02.02

MIDFIELDERS

7	Rahmat **AKBARI** (Afg)	(21) 20.06.00
8	Matti **STEINMANN** (Ger)	(27) 08.01.95
10	Nikola **MILEUSNIC**	(28) 17.07.93
11	Jez **LOFTHOUSE**	(22) 16.10.99
13	Henry **HORE**	(22) 17.08.99
14	Eli **ADAMS**	(20) 12.03.02
15	Jesse **DALEY**	(24) 16.10.97
21	Nick **OLSEN**	(26) 26.09.95
22	Alex **PARSONS**	(22) 06.01.00
26	Jay **O'SHEA** (Irl)	(33) 10.08.88
32	Brandon **McMORROW**	(20) 08.08.01
35	Louis **ZABALA**	(21) 25.01.01
57	Samuel **KLEIN**	(18) 15.03.04
	Connor **CHAPMAN**	(27) 31.10.94

FORWARDS

9	Luke **IVANOVIC**	(21) 06.06.00
18	Ryo **WADA** (Jpn)	(26) 05.07.95
23	Juan **LESCANO** (Arg)	(29) 29.10.92
29	Cyrus **DEHMIE**	(19) 25.05.02

COACH

Warren **MOON**	(39) 27.05.82

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mark **BIRIGHITTI**	(31) 17.04.91
24	Yaren **SOZER**	(25) 19.04.97
30	Patrick **BEACH**	(19) 19.11.02
40	Ricardo **RIZZO**	(21) 29.08.00
50	Lawrence **CARUSO**	(17) 15.09.04

DEFENDERS

3	Lewis **MILLER**	(21) 24.08.00
5	Noah **SMITH**	(21) 15.12.00
14	Kye **ROWLES**	(23) 19.05.98
15	Storm **ROUX** (Nzl)	(29) 13.01.93
18	Jacob **FARRELL**	(19) 19.11.02
21	Ruon **TONGYIK**	(25) 28.12.96
23	Dan **HALL** (Fij)	(22) 14.06.99
25	Matthew **HATCH**	(21) 24.09.00
35	Cameron **WINDUST**	

MIDFIELDERS

4	Josh **NISBET**	(22) 15.06.99
7	Cy **GODDARD** (Jpn)	(25) 02.04.97
8	Oliver **BOZANIC**	(33) 08.01.89
16	Max **BALARD**	(21) 20.11.00
27	Nicolai **MULLER** (Ger)	(34) 25.09.87
28	James **BAYLISS**	(21) 16.08.00
32	Brad **TAPP**	
33	Harry **McCARTHY**	(20) 13.11.01
34	Harry **STEELE**	(19) 12.10.02
46	Dor **JOK**	(21) 27.02.01

FORWARDS

9	Jason **CUMMINGS** (Sco)	(26) 01.08.95
10	**MORESCHE** (Bra)	(23) 24.06.98
11	Beni **N'KOLOLO** (Fra)	(25) 06.11.96
12	Marcos **URENA** (Crc)	(32) 05.03.90
17	Damian **TSEKENIS**	(21) 16.04.01
19	Matt **SIMON**	(36) 22.01.86
36	Garang **KUOL**	(17) 15.09.04

COACH

Nick **MONTGOMERY** (Sco)	(40) 28.10.81

MACARTHUR FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Nick **SUMAN**	(22) 28.02.00
12	Filip **KURTO** (Pol)	(30) 14.06.91
40	Levi **KAYE**	(21) 10.03.01

DEFENDERS

2	Jake **McGING**	(27) 22.05.94
3	Antony **GOLEC**	(31) 29.05.90
4	James **MEREDITH**	(34) 04.04.88
6	Aleksandar **JOVANOVIC**	(32) 04.08.89
15	Aleksandar **SUSNJAR**	(26) 19.08.95
20	Tomislav **USKOK**	(30) 22.06.91
23	Adrian **MARIAPPA** (Jam)	(35) 03.10.86

MIDFIELDERS

7	Daniel **DE SILVA**	(25) 06.03.97
8	Jordon **MUTCH** (Eng)	(30) 02.12.91
10	Ulises **DAVILA** (Mex)	(31) 13.04.91
21	Jake **HOLLMAN**	(20) 26.08.01
22	Liam **ROSE**	(25) 07.04.97
24	Charles **M'MOMBWA**	(24) 14.03.98
36	Jack **McLOUGHLIN**	(20) 01.08.01
37	Jed **DREW**	(18) 29.08.03
48	Rory **JORDAN**	(22) 09.02.00

FORWARDS

9	Tomi **JURIC**	(30) 22.07.91
11	Tommy **OAR**	(30) 10.12.91
14	Moudi **NAJJAR**	(21) 26.06.00
17	Craig **NOONE** (Eng)	(34) 17.11.87
19	Michael **RUHS**	(19) 27.08.02
31	Lachlan **ROSE**	(23) 10.05.99
35	**AL HASSAN** Toure	(21) 30.05.00
99	Apostolos **GIANNOU**	(32) 25.01.90

COACH

Ante **MILICIC**	(48) 04.04.74

MELBOURNE CITY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Tom **GLOVER**	(24) 24.12.97
33	Matt **SUTTON**	(22) 07.03.00
40	James **NIEUWENHUIZEN**	(18) 17.01.04
42	Ahmad **TALEB**	(19) 04.12.02

DEFENDERS

2	Scott **GALLOWAY**	(27) 10.04.95
3	Scott **JAMIESON**	(33) 13.10.88
4	Nuno **REIS** (Por)	(31) 31.01.91
6	Carl **JENKINSON** (Eng)	(30) 08.02.92
22	Curtis **GOOD**	(29) 23.03.93
34	Jordon **HALL**	(24) 23.03.98
36	Kerrin **STOKES**	(19) 11.12.02
38	Jordan **BOS**	(19) 29.10.02
45	Harry **POLITIDIS**	(19) 28.06.02

MIDFIELDERS

5	Rostyn **GRIFFITHS**	(34) 10.03.88
8	Aiden **O'NEILL**	(23) 04.07.98
10	Florin **BERENGUER** (Fra)	(33) 01.04.89
16	Taras **GOMULKA**	(20) 16.09.01
18	Connor **METCALFE**	(22) 05.11.99
20	Manuel **PUCCIARELLI** (Ita)	(30) 17.06.91
37	Max **CAPUTO**	(16) 17.08.05
39	Anthony **LESIOTIS**	(22) 24.04.00
47	Jordi **VALADON**	(19) 04.03.03
48	Luke **ORESTI**	(18) 30.06.03

FORWARDS

7	Mathew **LECKIE**	(31) 04.02.91
9	Jamie **MACLAREN**	(28) 29.07.93
14	Tsubasa **ENDOH** (Jpn)	(28) 20.08.93
15	Andrew **NABBOUT**	(29) 17.12.92
17	Stefan **COLAKOVSKI** (Mkd)	(22) 20.04.00
23	Marco **TILIO**	(20) 23.08.01
35	Raphael **BORGES RODRIGUES**	(18) 11.09.03

COACH

Patrick **KISNORBO**	(41) 24.03.81

MELBOURNE VICTORY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matthew **ACTON**	(29) 03.06.92
20	Ivan **KELAVA** (Cro)	(34) 20.02.88
30	Marko **BULIC**	(19) 24.05.02

DEFENDERS

2	Jason **GERIA**	(29) 10.05.93
3	Jason **DAVIDSON**	(30) 29.06.91
5	Matthew **SPIRANOVIC**	(33) 27.06.88
15	Aaron **ANDERSON**	(21) 25.09.00
16	Stefan **NIGRO**	(25) 10.08.96
17	Brendan **HAMILL**	(29) 18.09.92
21	Roderick **MIRANDA** (Por)	(31) 30.03.91
27	Zaydan **BELLO**	(19) 24.06.02
37	Edmond **LUPANCU**	

MIDFIELDERS

4	Rai **MARCHAN** (Spa)	(28) 11.08.93
6	Leigh **BROXHAM**	(34) 13.01.88
8	Joshua **BRILLANTE**	(29) 25.03.93
13	Birkan **KIRDAR**	(20) 07.02.02
14	Jay **BARNETT**	(21) 14.02.01
19	Luka **PRSO**	(21) 22.01.01
22	Jake **BRIMMER**	(24) 03.04.98
32	William **WILSON**	

FORWARDS

7	Chris **IKONOMIDIS**	(27) 04.05.95
9	Francesco **MARGIOTTA** (Ita)	(28) 15.07.93
10	Robbie **KRUSE**	(33) 05.10.88
11	Ben **FOLAMI**	(22) 08.06.99
18	Nick **D'AGOSTINO**	(24) 25.02.98
23	Marco **ROJAS** (Nzl)	(30) 05.11.91
24	Nishan **VELUPILLAY**	(21) 07.05.01
25	Luis **LAWRIE-LATTANZIO**	(20) 20.02.02
26	Lleyton **BROOKS**	(21) 20.03.01
38	Aisen **ISHAK** (Irq)	(20) 13.03.02

COACH

Tony **POPOVIC**	(48) 04.07.73

Derby rivalry...Melbourne City forward Mathew Leckie and Melbourne Victory defender Jason Geria battle for the ball at the AAMI Park

NEWCASTLE UNITED JETS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jack **DUNCAN**	(29) 19.04.93
20	Michael **WEIER**	(25) 27.01.97
40	Jack **KENNY**	

DEFENDERS

2	Dane **INGHAM** (Nzl)	(22) 06.08.99
3	Jason **HOFFMAN**	(33) 28.01.89
4	Jordan **ELSEY**	(28) 02.03.94
6	Matthew **JURMAN**	(32) 08.12.89
15	Dylan **MURNANE**	(27) 18.01.95
19	Taylor **REGAN**	(33) 16.11.88
27	Lucas **MAURAGIS**	(20) 04.09.01
44	Riley **WARLAND**	(19) 04.07.02

MIDFIELDERS

5	Ben **KANTAROVSKI**	(30) 20.01.92
7	Jordan **O'DOHERTY**	(24) 14.10.97
8	Mario **ARQUES** (Spa)	(30) 19.01.92
13	Brandon **WILSON**	(25) 28.01.97
14	Mohammed **AL TAAY**	(21) 15.06.00
16	Kosta **GROZOS**	(21) 10.08.00
28	Blake **ARCHIBOLD**	(20) 11.07.01
32	Angus **THURGATE**	(22) 08.02.00

FORWARDS

9	Beka **MIKELTADZE** (Geo)	(24) 26.11.97
10	Olivier **BOUMAL** (Cmr)	(32) 17.09.89
11	**DANIEL PENHA** (Bra)	(23) 17.10.98
17	Valentino **YUEL** (Ssd)	(27) 12.10.94
21	Savvas **SIATRAVANIS** (Gre)	(29) 24.11.92
23	Eli **BABALJ**	(30) 21.02.92
25	Sam **SILVERA**	(21) 25.10.00
26	Archie **GOODWIN**	(17) 07.11.04

COACH

Arthur **PAPAS**		(42) 12.02.80

Golden Boot hopeful...Newcastle United Jets' Georgian striker Beka Mikeltadze is one of the A-League's top goalscorers in 2021-22

PERTH GLORY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Brad **JONES**	(40) 19.03.82
12	Cameron **COOK**	(20) 16.08.01
33	Liam **REDDY**	(40) 08.08.81

DEFENDERS

4	Luke **BODNAR**	(21) 19.05.00
5	Jonathan **ASPROPOTAMITIS**	(25) 07.06.96
8	Kosuke **OTA** (Jpn)	(34) 23.07.87
14	Jack **CLISBY**	(30) 16.02.92
16	Darko **STANOJEVIC** (Srb)	(24) 30.09.97
22	Joshua **RAWLINS**	(18) 23.04.04
25	Jacob **YOUNG**	(22) 06.03.00
29	Darryl **LACHMAN** (Cuw)	(32) 11.11.89
31	Daniel **WALSH**	(19) 15.10.02
32	Aidan **COYNE**	(18) 16.11.03
34	Mason **TATAFU**	(20) 17.04.02
36	Joseph **FORDE**	(18) 24.06.03
37	Jacob **MUIR**	(20) 21.01.02

MIDFIELDERS

6	Osama **MALIK**	(31) 30.09.90
11	Nick **FITZGERALD**	(30) 13.02.92
13	Brandon **O'NEILL**	(28) 12.04.94
18	Daniel **STYNES**	(23) 29.08.98
19	Callum **TIMMINS**	(22) 23.12.99
23	Mitchell **OXBORROW**	(27) 18.02.95
24	Pacifique **NIYONGABIRE**	(22) 15.03.00
26	Giordano **COLLI**	(22) 12.03.00
28	Trent **OSTLER**	(20) 03.04.02
41	Chris **DONNELL**	(20) 28.08.01
43	Adam **ZIMARINO**	(21) 15.03.01
45	Aidan **EDWARDS**	(20) 28.08.01
47	Tyler **VECCHIO**	(19) 15.01.03

FORWARDS

7	Adrian **SARDINERO** (Spa)	(31) 13.10.90
9	Bruno **FORNAROLI**	(34) 07.09.87
10	Andy **KEOGH** (Irl)	(35) 16.05.86
15	Daniel **STURRIDGE** (Eng)	(32) 01.09.89
20	Carlo **ARMIENTO**	(22) 04.06.99
21	Antonee **BURKE-GILROY**	(24) 03.10.97
38	Ciaran **BRAMWELL**	(20) 12.02.02
42	Joshua **ANASMO**	
88	Jayden **GORMAN**	(19) 25.01.03

COACH

Ruben **ZADKOVICH** *(Interim)*		(35) 23.05.86

SYDNEY FC

GOALKEEPERS

1	Andrew **REDMAYNE**	(33) 13.01.89
20	Thomas **HEWARD-BELLE**	(25) 11.03.97
30	Adam **PAVLESIC**	(19) 30.07.02
40	Max **VARTULI**	

DEFENDERS

2	James **DONACHIE**	(28) 14.05.93
3	Benjamin **WARLAND**	(25) 04.09.96
4	Alex **WILKINSON**	(37) 13.08.84
5	Connor **O'TOOLE**	(24) 04.07.97
7	Michael **ZULLO**	(33) 11.09.88
21	Harry **VAN DER SAAG**	(22) 29.10.99
23	Rhyan **GRANT**	(31) 26.02.91
25	Callum **TALBOT**	(21) 26.02.01

MIDFIELDERS

6	Mustafa **AMINI**	(29) 20.04.93
8	Paulo **RETRE**	(29) 04.03.93
10	Milos **NINKOVIC** (Srb)	(37) 25.12.84
17	Anthony **CACERES**	(29) 29.09.92
19	Chris **ZUVELA**	(25) 21.01.97
22	Max **BURGESS**	(27) 16.01.95
24	Corey **HOLLMAN**	(18) 25.09.03
26	Luke **BRATTAN**	(32) 08.03.90
27	Elvis **KAMSOBA** (Bdi)	(25) 27.06.96
28	Calem **NIEUWENHOF**	(21) 17.02.01
31	Adrian **SEGECIC**	(17) 01.06.04
32	Patrick **YAZBEK**	(19) 22.08.02

FORWARDS

9	**BOBO** (Bra)	(37) 09.01.85
11	Kosta **BARBAROUSES** (Nzl)	(32) 19.02.90
12	Trent **BUHAGIAR**	(24) 27.02.98
14	Adam **LE FONDRE** (Eng)	(35) 02.12.86
16	Luciano **NARSINGH** (Ned)	(31) 13.09.90
33	Patrick **WOOD**	(19) 16.09.02

COACH

Steve **CORICA**		(49) 24.03.73

WELLINGTON PHOENIX

GOALKEEPERS

20	Oliver **SAIL** (Nzl)	(26) 13.01.96
30	Henry **GRAY** (Nzl)	(17) 29.03.05
40	Alex **PAULSEN** (Nzl)	(19) 04.07.02

DEFENDERS

3	Matthew **BOZINOVSKI** (Mkd)	(21) 05.01.01
4	Scott **WOOTTON** (Eng)	(30) 12.09.91
5	James **McGARRY** (Nzl)	(24) 09.04.98
6	Tim **PAYNE** (Nzl)	(28) 10.01.94
16	Louis **FENTON** (Nzl)	(29) 03.04.93
17	Callan **ELLIOT** (Nzl)	(22) 07.07.99
21	Josh **LAWS**	(24) 26.02.98
31	Kurtis **MOGG** (Nzl)	(21) 09.05.01
33	Finn **SURMAN** (Nzl)	(18) 23.09.03

MIDFIELDERS

7	Gael **SANDOVAL** (Mex)	(26) 05.11.95
8	Ben **OLD** (Nzl)	(19) 13.08.02
10	Reno **PISCOPO**	(23) 27.05.98
13	Nicholas **PENNINGTON**	(23) 18.12.98
14	Alex **RUFER** (Nzl)	(25) 12.06.96
19	Sam **SUTTON** (Nzl)	(20) 10.12.01
23	Clayton **LEWIS** (Nzl)	(25) 12.02.97
34	Jackson **MANUEL** (Nzl)	(19) 24.02.03
38	Luis **TOOMEY** (Nzl)	(20) 01.07.01

FORWARDS

9	David **BALL** (Eng)	(32) 14.12.89
11	Jaushua **SOTIRIO**	(26) 11.10.95
18	Ben **WAINE** (Nzl)	(20) 11.06.01
32	George **OTT** (Nzl)	(20) 22.10.01
36	Riley **BIDOIS** (Nzl)	(20) 12.03.02
43	Oskar **VAN HATTUM** (Nzl)	(20) 14.04.02
88	Gary **HOOPER** (Eng)	(34) 26.01.88

COACH

Ufuk **TALAY**		(46) 26.03.76

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Daniel **MARGUSH**	(24) 28.11.97
20	Tomas **MEJIAS** (Spa)	(33) 30.01.89
30	Jack **WARSHAWSKY**	(17) 08.08.04
	Vedran **JANJETOVIC**	(34) 20.08.87

DEFENDERS

2	Ziggy **GORDON** (Sco)	(29) 23.04.93
3	Adama **TRAORE** (Civ)	(32) 03.02.90
4	Rhys **WILLIAMS**	(33) 14.07.88
6	Tass **MOURDOUKOUTAS**	(23) 03.03.99
13	Tate **RUSSELL**	(22) 24.08.99
15	Tomislav **MRCELA**	(31) 01.10.90
19	Daniel **WILMERING**	(21) 19.12.00
22	John **KOUTROUMBIS**	(24) 06.03.98
25	Phillip **CANCAR**	(21) 11.05.01
32	Jarrod **CARLUCCIO**	(21) 08.02.01
33	Mark **NATTA**	(19) 28.11.02
35	Nectarios **TRIANTIS**	(17) 11.05.05
39	Thomas **AQUILINA**	(21) 02.02.01
43	Isaac **HOVAR**	(19) 08.09.02

MIDFIELDERS

5	Jack **RODWELL** (Eng)	(31) 11.03.91
8	Steven **UGARKOVIC** (Cro)	(27) 19.08.94
14	James **TROISI**	(33) 03.07.88
17	Keanu **BACCUS**	(23) 07.06.98
29	Terry **ANTONIS**	(28) 26.11.93

FORWARDS

7	Ramy **NAJJARINE**	(22) 23.04.00
9	Bernie **IBINI**	(29) 12.09.92
10	Tomer **HEMED** (Isr)	(35) 02.05.87
11	Keijiro **OGAWA** (Jpn)	(29) 14.07.92
21	Jordan **SWIBEL**	(23) 13.04.99
23	Dimitri **PETRATOS**	(29) 10.11.92
36	Alessandro **LOPANE**	(18) 09.04.04
37	Alex **BADOLATO**	(17) 23.02.05

COACH

Mark **RUDAN**		(46) 27.08.75

WESTERN UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jamie **YOUNG** (Eng)	(36) 25.08.85
37	Ryan **SCOTT**	(26) 18.12.95
40	Charlie **EMERY**	(18) 11.06.03

DEFENDERS

4	Leo **LACROIX** (Sui)	(30) 27.02.92
5	Dylan **PIERIAS**	(22) 20.02.00
6	Tomoki **IMAI** (Jpn)	(31) 29.11.90
12	Dalibor **MARKOVIC**	(20) 17.01.02
13	Ivan **VUJICA**	(25) 20.04.97
17	Ben **GARUCCIO**	(26) 15.06.95
19	Joshua **RISDON**	(29) 27.07.92
33	Ben **COLLINS**	(22) 15.01.00
36	Ajak **DEU**	(21) 02.01.01
44	Nikolai **TOPOR-STANLEY**	(37) 11.03.85

MIDFIELDERS

10	Steven **LUSTICA**	(31) 12.04.91
11	Connor **PAIN**	(28) 11.11.93
16	Rene **KRHIN** (Svn)	(31) 21.05.90
21	Sebastian **PASQUALI**	(22) 07.11.99
25	Luke **DUZEL**	(20) 05.02.02
26	Nicolas **MILANOVIC**	(20) 14.11.01
27	Jerry **SKOTADIS**	(22) 07.03.00
42	Rhys **BOZINOVSKI**	(18) 07.03.04
88	Neil **KILKENNY**	(36) 19.12.85

FORWARDS

8	Lachlan **WALES**	(24) 19.10.97
9	Dylan **WENZEL-HALLS**	(30) 15.04.92
23	Alessandro **DIAMANTI** (Ita)	(39) 02.05.83
31	Adisu **BAYEW**	(20) 27.12.01
34	Christian **THEOHAROUS**	(22) 06.12.99
38	Noah **BOTIC**	(20) 11.01.02
99	Aleksandar **PRIJOVIC** (Srb)	(32) 21.04.90

COACH

John **ALOISI**		(46) 05.02.76

(ages as of 13.05.22)

Club Football

EUROPE

2021-22 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals – 1st leg

Apr 5 – Lisbon
Benfica 1 (Nunez 49)
Liverpool 3 (Konate 17, Mane 34, Diaz 87)

Apr 5 – Manchester
Manchester City 1 (De Bruyne 70)
Atletico Madrid 0

Apr 6 – London
Chelsea 1 (Havertz 40)
Real Madrid 3 (Benzema 21, 24, 46)

Apr 6 – Villarreal
Villarreal 1 (Danjuma 8)
Bayern Munich 0

Quarter-Finals – 2nd leg

Apr 12 – Munich
Bayern Munich 1 (Lewandowski 52)
Villarreal 1 (Chukwueze 88)
Villarreal win 2-1 on aggregate

Apr 12 – Madrid
Real Madrid 2 (Rodrygo 80, Benzema 96)
Chelsea 3 (Mount 15, Rudiger 51, Werner 75)
AET. Real Madrid win 5-4 on aggregate

Apr 13 – Madrid
Atletico Madrid 0
Manchester City 0
Manchester City win 1-0 on aggregate

Apr 13 – Liverpool
Liverpool 3 (Konate 21, Firmino 55, 65)
Benfica 3 (Ramos 32, Yaremchuk 73, Nunez 82)
Liverpool win 6-4 on aggregate

2021-22 UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals – 1st leg

Apr 7 – Leipzig
RB Leipzig 1 (Zappacosta 58 og)
Atalanta 1 (Muriel 17)

Apr 7 – Frankfurt
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Knauff 48)
Barcelona 1 (Torres 66)

Apr 7 – London
West Ham United 1 (Bowen 52)
Lyon 1 (Ndombele 66)

Apr 7 – Braga
Braga 1 (Ruiz 40)
Rangers 0

Quarter-Finals – 2nd leg

Apr 14 – Bergamo
Atalanta 0
RB Leipzig 2 (Nkunku 18, 87 pen)
RB Leipzig win 3-1 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Barcelona
Barcelona 2 (Busquets 90+1, Depay 90+11 pen)
E. Frankfurt 3 (Kostic 4 pen, 67, Santos Borre 36)
Eintracht Frankfurt win 4-3 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Lyon
Lyon 0
West Ham Utd 3 (Dawson 38, Rice 44, Bowen 48)
West Ham United win 4-1 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Glasgow
Rangers 3 (Tavernier 2, 44 pen, Roofe 101)
Braga 1 (Carmo 83)
AET. Rangers win 3-2 on aggregate

2021-22 UEFA EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals – 1st leg

Apr 7 – Bodo
Bodo/Glimt 2 (Saltnes 56, Vetlesen 89)
Roma 1 (Pellegrini 43)

Apr 7 – Rotterdam
Feyenoord 3 (Sinisterra 10, Senesi 74, Kokcu 86)
Slavia Prague 3 (Olayinka 41, Sor 67, Traore 90+5)

Apr 7 – Marseille
Marseille 2 (Gerson 13, Payet 45)
PAOK 1 (El Kaddouri 48)

Apr 7 – Leicester City
Leicester City 0
PSV 0

Quarter-Finals – 2nd leg

Apr 14 – Rome
Roma 4 (Abraham 5, Zaniolo 23, 29, 49)
Bodo/Glimt 0
Roma win 5-2 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Prague
Slavia Prague 1 (Traore 14)
Feyenoord 3 (Dessers 2, 59, Sinisterra 78)
Feyenoord win 6-4 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Thessaloniki
PAOK 0
Marseille 1 (Payet 34)
Marseille win 3-1 on aggregate

Apr 14 – Eindhoven
PSV 1 (Zahavi 27)
Leicester City 2 (Maddison 77, Pereira 88)
Leicester City win 2-1 on aggregate

COPA DEL REY FINAL 2021-22

Apr 23 – Seville
Real Betis 1 (Iglesias 11)
Valencia 1 (Duro 30)
AET. Real Betis win 5-4 on penalties

DUTCH CUP FINAL 2021-22

Apr 17 – Rotterdam
PSV 2 (Gutierrez 48, Gakpo 50)
Ajax 1 (Gravenberch 23)

BELGIAN CUP FINAL 2021-22

Apr 18 – Brussels
Gent 0
Anderlecht 0
AET. Gent win 4-3 on penalties

UEFA YOUTH LEAGUE FINAL 2021-22

Apr 25 – Nyon
Red Bull Salzburg 0
Benfica 6 (Neto 2, H. Araujo 15, 57, 89 pen, Ndour 53, Semedo 69)

AFRICA

2021-22 CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-Finals – 1st leg

Apr 15 – Algiers
ES Setif 0
Esperance 0

Apr 16 – Cairo
Al Ahly 2 (El Solia 13 pen, El Shahat 23)
Raja 1 (Zrida 45+1)

Apr 16 – Algiers
CR Belouizdad 0
Wydad 1 (Mbenza 46)

Apr 16 – Luanda
Petro de Luanda 2 (Azulao 16, Yano 45+1)
Mamelodi Sundowns 1 (Lakay 6)

Quarter-Finals – 2nd leg

Apr 22 – Tunis
Esperance 0
ES Setif 1 (Djabou 21)
ES Setif win 1-0 on aggregate

Apr 22 – Casablanca
Raja 1 (Ngoma 5)
Al Ahly 1 (Abdelmonem 44)
Al Ahly win 3-2 on aggregate

Apr 23 – Casablanca
Wydad 0
CR Belouizdad 0
Wydad win 1-0 on aggregate

Apr 23 – Johannesburg
Mamelodi Sundowns 1 (Onyango 49)
Petro de Luanda 1 (Azulao 69 pen)
Petro de Luanda win 3-2 on aggregate

ASIA

2022 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group Stage

West Region

Group A

Apr 8 – Riyadh
Istiklol 2 (Sulaimonov 3, Isaev 67)
Al Rayyan 3 (Brahimi 8, Boli 44, 71)

Apr 8 – Riyadh
Al Hilal 2 (Al Shehri 5 pen, Michael 62)
Sharjah 1 (Shukurov 7)

Apr 11 – Riyadh
Al Rayyan 0
Al Hilal 3 (Al Hamdan 27, Kanno 49, N. Al Dawsari 87)

Apr 11 – Riyadh
Sharjah 2 (Lucas 54, Bernard 57)
Istiklol 1 (M. Dzhalilov 29)

Apr 15 – Riyadh
Sharjah 1 (Bernard 45)
Al Rayyan 1 (Nzonzi 65)

Apr 15 – Riyadh
Al Hilal 1 (Al Faraj 52)
Istiklol 0

Apr 19 – Riyadh
Al Rayyan 3 (Al Sharji 12 og, Nzonzi 39, Brahimi 62)
Sharjah 1 (Lucas 18)

Apr 19 – Riyadh
Istiklol 0
Al Hilal 3 (Ighalo 8, 33, S. Al Dawsari 90+2)

Apr 23 – Riyadh
Al Rayyan 1 (Boli 90)
Istiklol 0

Apr 23 – Riyadh
Sharjah 2 (Camara 5, Rashid 45+1)
Al Hilal 2 (Al Mufarrij 78, S. Al-Dawsari 90+6 pen)

Apr 27 – Riyadh
Al Hilal 0
Al Rayyan 2 (Jang Hyun-soo 5 og, Boli 43)

Apr 27 – Riyadh
Istiklol 2 (Bocoum 14, Kasmynin 90+1)
Sharjah 0

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	5	13
Al Rayyan (Q)	6	4	1	1	10	7	13
Sharjah	6	1	2	3	7	11	5
Istiklol	6	1	0	5	5	10	3

Group B

Apr 8 – Riyadh
Mumbai City 0
Al Shabab 3 (Banega 36 pen, 68, Al Ammar 77)

Apr 8 – Riyadh
Al Jazira 1 (Al Ameri 43)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 2 (Jabbar 11, Kadhim 82)

Apr 11 – Riyadh
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 1 (Ahmed 59)
Mumbai City 2 (Mauricio 70 pen, Bheke 75)

Apr 11 – Riyadh
Al Shabab 3 (Carlos 6, 78, Al Ammar 18)
Al Jazira 0

Apr 14 – Riyadh
Al Jazira 1 (Mabkhout 40 pen)
Mumbai City 0

Apr 14 – Riyadh
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 1 (Miller 68)
Al Shabab 1 (Al Qahtani 90+6)

Apr 18 – Riyadh
Mumbai City 0
Al Jazira 0

Apr 18 – Riyadh
Al Shabab 3 (Al Abed 30, Carlos 39, 73)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 0

Apr 22 – Riyadh
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 3 (Bayesh 6, Abbas 60, Abdul-Kadhim 90+1)
Al Jazira 2 (Ramadan 62, Traore 77)

Apr 22 – Riyadh
Al Shabab 6 (Bahebri 19, 64, 66, Fall 36 og, Al Jouei 52, Carlos 81)
Mumbai City 0

Apr 26 – Riyadh
Al Jazira 0
Al Shabab 2 (Mary 68, Paulinho 88)

Apr 26 – Riyadh
Mumbai City 1 (Mauricio 31)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya 0

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shabab (Q)	6	5	1	0	18	1	16
Mumbai City	6	2	1	3	3	11	7
Al Quwa Al Jawiya	6	2	1	3	7	10	7
Al Jazira	6	1	1	4	4	10	4

Group C

Apr 7 – Jeddah
Foolad 0
Al Gharafa 0

Apr 7 – Jeddah
Ahal 1 (Bashimov 75)
Shabab Al Ahli 1 (Ganiev 79 pen)

Apr 10 – Jeddah
Shabab Al Ahli 1 (Cartabia 90+1)
Foolad 1 (Nourollahi 83 og)

Apr 10 – Jeddah
Al Gharafa 2 (Diabate 60, Alaaeldin 87)
Ahal 0

Apr 14 – Jeddah
Foolad 1 (Coulibaly 90+7)
Ahal 0

Apr 14 – Jeddah
Al Gharafa 1 (Hanni 44)
Shabab Al Ahli 1 (Cartabia 90+1)

Apr 18 – Jeddah
Ahal 0
Foolad 1 (Patosi 39)

Apr 18 – Jeddah
Shabab Al Ahli 8 (Olsen 14, 40, Al Maazmi 42, Ganiev 50, 83, Cartabia 51, Al Balooshi 66, Al Mazam 78)
Al Gharafa 2 (Alaaeldin 16, Hanni 59 pen)

Apr 22 – Jeddah
Shabab Al Ahli 2 (Cartabia 13, 45)
Ahal 1 (Amanow 74 pen)

Apr 22 – Jeddah
Al Gharafa 0
Foolad 1 (Chimba 15)

Apr 26 – Jeddah
Foolad 1 (Chimba 71 pen)
Shabab Al Ahli 1 (Al Ghassani 82)

Apr 26 – Jeddah
Ahal 4 (Amanow 9 pen, 70 pen, 80, Beknazarov 38)
Al Gharafa 2 (Hassan 35, Hanni 90+4 pen)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Foolad (Q)	6	3	3	0	5	2	12
Shabab Al Ahli (Q)	6	2	4	0	14	7	10
Al Gharafa	6	1	2	3	7	14	5
Ahal	6	1	1	4	6	9	4

Group D

Apr 7 – Buraidah
Pakhtakor 1 (Ceran 28)
Sepahan 3 (Moghanlou 49, 55, Hosseini 70)

Apr 7 – Buraidah
Al Duhail 1 (Edmilson 7)
Al Taawoun 2 (Tawamba 11, Medran 86)

Apr 10 – Buraidah
Sepahan 0
Al Duhail 1 (Olunga 84)

Apr 10 – Buraidah
Al Taawoun 0
Pakhtakor 1 (Erkinov 83)

Apr 14 – Buraidah
Al Duhail 3 (Edmilson 66, 71, 84)
Pakhtakor 2 (Sarkic 44, Sabirkhodjaev 69)

Apr 14 – Buraidah
Al Taawoun 3 (Al Sobhi 43, Ze Luis 46, Al Bakr 77)
Sepahan 0

Apr 18 – Buraidah
Pakhtakor 0
Al Duhail 3 (Al Rawi 32, Olunga 45+2, Ali 47)

Apr 18 – Buraidah
Sepahan 1 (Moghanlou 65)
Al Taawoun 1 (Al Nabit 47)

Apr 22 – Buraidah
Sepahan 2 (Shahbazzadeh 76, 90+3)
Pakhtakor 1 (Alijonov 79)

Apr 22 – Buraidah
Al Taawoun 3 (Tawamba 21, 37, Al Amri 25)
Al Duhail 4 (Boudiaf 11, Edmilson 58, 84 pen, Ali 88)

Apr 26 – Buraidah
Al Duhail 5 (Olunga 10, 35, Edmilson 41, 90, Sassi 50)
Sepahan 2 (Nejadmehdi 20, Rafiei 82)

Apr 26 – Buraidah
Pakhtakor 5 (Fayzullayev 22, Turgunboev 31, Sabirkhodjaev 32, Mirakhmadov 78, Ergashboyev 86)
Al Taawoun 4 (Al Bakr 14, Al Nabit 51, 60, Al Amri 83 pen)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Duhail (Q)	6	5	0	1	17	9	15
Al Taawoun	6	2	1	3	13	12	7
Sepahan	6	2	1	3	8	12	7
Pakhtakor	6	2	0	4	10	15	6

Group E

Apr 8 – Dammam
Al Sadd 1 (Khoukhi 55)
Nasaf Qarshi 1 (Ro-Ro 31 og)

Apr 8 – Dammam
Al Wehdat 1 (Samir 50)
Al Faisaly 1 (Faik 12)

Apr 11 – Dammam
Nasaf Qarshi 2 (Stanojevic 71, 85 pen)
Al Wehdat 0

Apr 11 – Dammam
Al Faisaly 2 (Faik 16, Tavares 53)
Al Sadd 1 (Al Haydos 4)

Apr 15 – Dammam
Al Sadd 5 (Afif 23 pen, Cazorla 58, Ayew 62, Tabata 72, Al Bayati 90+3)
Al Wehdat 2 (Samir 42, Anas 44)

Apr 15 – Dammam
Nasaf Qarshi 0
Al Faisaly 1 (Tavares 29)

Apr 19 – Dammam
Al Wehdat 3 (Al Dmeiri 48, Assam 60, Samir 75)
Al Sadd 1 (Tabata 54)

Apr 19 – Dammam
Al Faisaly 0
Nasaf Qarshi 0

Apr 23 – Dammam
Nasaf Qarshi 3 (Mozgovoy 63, 77, Norchaev 75)
Al Sadd 1 (Tabata 90+1)

Apr 23 – Dammam
Al Faisaly 1 (Boyle 90+3)
Al Wehdat 1 (Sariweh 90+1)

Apr 27 – Dammam
Al Wehdat 2 (Anas 34, Abu Taha 82)
Nasaf Qarshi 2 (Stanojevic 3, Norchaev 59)

Apr 27 – Dammam
Al Sadd 1 (Ro-Ro 45+2)
Al Faisaly 0

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Faisaly (Q)	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Nasaf Qarshi (Q)	6	2	3	1	8	5	9
Al Sadd	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Al Wehdat	6	1	3	2	9	12	6

East Region

Group F

Apr 15 – Buriram
Shandong Taishan 0
Daegu FC 7 (Lee Keun-ho 15, Zeca 19, 26, 77, Hong Chul 48, Lamas 66, Jung Chi-in 69)

Apr 15 – Buriram
Lion City Sailors 1 (Karlsson 43 og)
Urawa Red Diamonds 4 (Junker 8, Esaka 15, Karlsson 42, Matsuo 47)

Apr 18 – Buriram
Daegu FC 0
Lion City Sailors 3 (Song Ui-young 21, Diego Lopes 71, Pedrao 80)

Apr 18 – Buriram
Urawa Red Diamonds 5 (Akimoto 26, Scholz 31 pen, Schalk 53, 76, Yasui 90+2)
Shandong Taishan 0

Apr 21 – Buriram
Shandong Taishan 0
Lion City Sailors 0

Apr 21 – Buriram
Daegu FC 1 (Zeca 53)
Urawa Red Diamonds 0

Apr 24 – Buriram
Urawa Red Diamonds 0
Daegu FC 0

Apr 24 – Buriram
Lion City Sailors 3 (Song Ui-young 45+2, Henrique 60, Lestienne 82)
Shandong Taishan 2 (Lu Yongtao 76 pen, Liu Guobao 90)

Apr 27 – Buriram
Urawa Red Diamonds 6 (Mawatari 14, Schalk 39, Karlsson 48, Koizumi 52, Matsuo 62, 90)
Lion City Sailors 0

Apr 27 – Buriram
Daegu FC 4 (Zeca 8, Hong Jeong-woon 12, Lee Keun-ho 57, Oh Hoo-sung 66)
Shandong Taishan 0

Apr 30 – Buriram
Shandong Taishan 0
Urawa Red Diamonds 5 (Yasui 13, Chinen 34, 85, Matsuo 45+1, 69)

Apr 30 – Buriram
Lion City Sailors 1 (Song Ui-young 26)
Daegu FC 2 (Lee Keun-ho 54, Zeca 81 pen)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Daegu FC (Q)	6	4	1	1	14	4	13
Urawa Reds (Q)	6	4	1	1	20	2	13
Lion City Sailors	6	2	1	3	8	14	7
Shandong T.	6	0	1	5	2	24	1

Group G

Apr 15 – Pathum Thani
BG Pathum United 1 (Teerasil 35)
Melbourne City 1 (Nabbout 22)

Apr 15 – Pathum Thani
United City 0
Jeonnam Dragons 1 (Pllana 87)

Apr 18 – Pathum Thani
Jeonnam Dragons 0
BG Pathum United 2 (Pathompol 51, Jakkapan 72)

Apr 18 – Pathum Thani
Melbourne City 3 (Colakovski 34, Tilio 59, 75)
United City 0

Apr 21 – Pathum Thani
BG Pathum United 5 (Kanokpon 42, Worachit 75, Diogo 80, Robertson 82 og, Pathompol 87)
United City 0

Apr 21 – Pathum Thani
Melbourne City 2 (Jenkinson 12, Nabbout 22)
Jeonnam Dragons 1 (Lee Kyu-hyuk 16)

Apr 24 – Pathum Thani
Jeonnam Dragons 1 (Kacharava 90+2)
Melbourne City 1 (Maclaren 89)

Apr 24 – Pathum Thani
United City 1 (Hartmann 79)
BG Pathum United 3 (Diogo 17, Ikhsan 29, 39)

Apr 27 – Pathum Thani
Melbourne City 0
BG Pathum United 0

Apr 27 – Pathum Thani
Jeonnam Dragons 2 (Pllana 58, Park In-hyeok 90+3)
United City 0

Apr 30 – Pathum Thani
BG Pathum United 0
Jeonnam Dragons 0

Apr 30 – Pathum Thani
United City 0
Melbourne City 3 (Rodrigues 22, Maclaren 68, Tilio 90)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BG Patham (Q)	6	3	3	0	11	2	12
Melbourne City	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
Jeonnam Drag.	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
United City	6	2	0	6	1	17	0

Group H

Apr 16 – Ho Chi Minh City
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 1 (Kida 31 og)
Yokohama F. Marinos 2 (Leo Ceara 19, 25)

Apr 16 – Ho Chi Minh City
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 0
Sydney FC 0

Apr 19 – Ho Chi Minh City
Sydney FC 1 (Buhagiar 59)
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 1 (Vu Van Thanh 26)

Apr 19 – Ho Chi Minh City
Yokohama F. Marinos 0
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 1 (Iljutcenko 31 pen)

Apr 22 – Ho Chi Minh City
Jeonbuk Hyundai 1 (Moon Seon-min 90+3)
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 0

Apr 22 – Ho Chi Minh City
Sydney FC 0
Yokohama F. Marinos 1 (Tsunoda 80)

Apr 25 – Ho Chi Minh City
Yokohama F. Marinos 3 (Saneto 6, Nishimura 11, Lopes 87)
Sydney FC 0

Apr 25 – Ho Chi Minh City
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 1 (Nguyen Van Toan 62)
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 1 (Moon Seon-min 17)

Apr 28 – Ho Chi Minh City
Yokohama F. Marinos 2 (Junior 36 pen, Hatanaka 83)
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 0

Apr 28 – Ho Chi Minh City
Sydney FC 2 (Le Fondre 40, Wood 90+1)
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 3 (Han Kyo-won 49, Iljutcenko 67, Gustavo 78)

May 1 – Ho Chi Minh City
Hoang Anh Gia Lai 1 (Brandao 39)
Sydney FC 0

May 1 – Ho Chi Minh City
Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 1 (Kim Bo-kyung 11)
Yokohama F. Marinos 1 (Lopes 4)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Yokohama (Q)	6	4	1	1	9	3	13
Jeonbuk (Q)	6	3	3	0	7	4	12
Hoang AGL	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
Sydney FC	6	0	2	4	3	9	2

Group I

Apr 15 – Johor Bahru
Kawasaki Frontale 1 (Kurumaya 90+4)
Ulsan Hyundai 1 (Souza 21)

Apr 15 – Johor Bahru
Johor Darul Ta'zim 5 (Bergson 10, 27, 52, He Lipan 13 og, Ramadhan 81)
Guangzhou FC 0

Apr 18 – Johor Bahru
Guangzhou FC 0
Kawasaki Frontale 8 (Chinen 7, 12, Kurumaya 16, 71, Kobayashi 21, 39, Miyagi 50, Chanathip 69)

Apr 18 – Johor Bahru
Ulsan Hyundai 1 (Um Won-sang 52)
Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Forestieri 3, Bergson 80)

Apr 21 – Johor Bahru
Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Koszta 28, Park Chu-young 57, Yun Il-lok 68)
Guangzhou FC 0

Apr 21 – Johor Bahru
Kawasaki Frontale 0
Johor Darul Ta'zim 0

Apr 24 – Johor Bahru
Guangzhou FC 0
Ulsan Hyundai 5 (Yun Il-lok 4, Koszta 54, Qazaishvili 64, Amano 73, Seol Young-woo 85)

Apr 24 – Johor Bahru
Johor Darul Ta'zim 0
Kawasaki Frontale 5 (Wakizaka 14, Kobayashi 31, 43, Marcinho 81, Songkrasin 88)

Apr 27 – Johor Bahru
Ulsan Hyundai 3 (Souza 14, Um Won-sang 20, Qazaishvili 47)
Kawasaki Frontale 2 (Leandro Damiao 40, 90+2)

Apr 27 – Johor Bahru
Guangzhou FC 0
Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Bergson 16 pen, 90+6 pen)

Apr 30 – Johor Bahru
Kawasaki Frontale 1 (Chinen 14)
Guangzhou FC 0

Apr 30 – Johor Bahru
Johor Darul Ta'zim 2 (Velazquez 5, Park Yong-woo 90+4 og)
Ulsan Hyundai 1 (Amano 6)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Johor Darul (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	7	13
Kawasaki F.	6	3	2	1	17	4	11
Ulsan Hyundai	6	3	1	2	14	7	10
Guangzhou FC	6	0	0	6	0	24	0

Group J

Apr 16 – Buriram
Kitchee 1 (Mingazow 17)
Chiangrai United 0

Apr 19 – Buriram
Vissel Kobe 2 (Goke 15, Inoue 85)
Kitchee 1 (Akande 90+1)

Apr 22 – Buriram
Vissel Kobe 6 (Osako 10, Yuruki 25, 38, Goke 32, Lincoln 58, Osaki 74)
Chiangrai United 0

Apr 25 – Buriram
Chiangrai United 0
Vissel Kobe 0

Apr 28 – Buriram
Chiangrai Utd 2 (Phitiwat 45+2 pen, Sarawut 79)
Kitchee 3 (Akande 55, Damjanovic 70, Tsz Chun 81)

May 1 – Buriram
Kitchee 2 (Damjanovic 45+3 pen, Baena 90+1)
Vissel Kobe 2 (Lincoln 44 pen, Muto 87)

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vissel Kobe (Q)	4	2	2	0	10	3	8
Kitchee (Q)	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Chiangrai Utd	4	0	1	3	2	10	1

Shanghai Port withdrew due to lockdown measures

INDONESIA

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bali United (C)	34	23	6	5	57	26	75
Persib	34	20	9	5	48	22	69
Bhayangkara	34	19	9	6	48	27	66
Arema	34	18	11	5	44	25	65
Persebaya Surabaya	34	18	9	7	56	35	63
Borneo	34	14	10	10	43	35	52
PSIS Semarang	34	11	13	10	35	34	46
Persija	34	11	12	11	43	40	45
Madura United	34	10	11	13	45	43	41
TIRA-Persikabo	34	10	10	14	49	48	40
Persik Kediri	34	9	12	13	33	39	39
Persita	34	9	12	13	39	49	39
PSS Sleman	34	10	9	15	40	48	39
PSM	34	8	14	12	31	41	38
Barito Putera	34	9	9	16	41	49	36
Persipura (R)	34	10	9	15	36	47	36
Persela (R)	34	3	12	19	32	61	21
Persiraja (R)	34	2	7	25	18	69	13

LEBANON

Championship Round final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahed (C)	18	14	4	0	40	5	46
Bourj	18	10	6	2	22	13	36
Al Ansar	18	9	5	4	33	13	32
Shabab Al Sahel	18	8	2	8	28	30	26
Shabab El Bourj	18	5	3	10	20	36	18
Tadamon Sour	18	4	5	9	15	22	17

Relegation Round final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tripoli SC	18	8	3	7	21	20	27
Al Nejmeh*	18	7	8	3	23	13	23
Hekmeh	18	7	2	9	15	29	23
Akhaa Ahli Aley	18	5	4	9	12	20	19
Safa (R)	18	4	4	10	12	27	16
Sporting Beirut (R)	18	3	2	13	13	26	11

Al Nejmeh deducted 6 points

PALESTINE

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shabab Al Khalil (C)	22	16	6	0	41	9	54
Jabal Al Mukaber	22	16	3	3	53	24	51
Hilal Al Quds	22	12	5	5	47	25	41
Shabab Alsamu	22	12	4	6	46	33	40
Markaz Balata	22	10	4	8	32	26	34
Islami Kalkelea	22	8	4	10	26	31	28
Shabab Al Dhahiriya	22	8	3	11	28	44	27
Thaqafi Tulkarem	22	6	8	8	28	35	26
Al Bireh Institute	22	4	7	11	24	35	19
Shabab Al Am'ari	22	4	4	14	34	45	16
Tubas (R)	22	4	4	14	18	38	16
Markaz Tulkarm (R)	22	4	4	14	20	52	16

QATAR

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Sadd (C)	22	20	2	0	80	24	62
Al Duhail	22	14	5	3	59	24	47
Al Wakrah	22	11	4	7	34	30	37
Al Arabi	22	11	3	8	34	31	36
Al Gharafa	22	9	3	10	39	40	30
Umm Salal	22	6	7	9	32	36	25
Al Ahli	22	5	10	7	24	39	25
Al Rayyan	22	6	6	10	31	40	24
Qatar SC	22	6	5	11	21	31	23
Al Shamal	22	6	4	12	32	47	22
Al Sailiya*	22	3	7	12	17	36	16
Al Khor (R)	22	2	10	10	21	46	16

Al Sailiya defeated second division Al Kharitiyath 3-2 in the relegation play-off

SRI LANKA

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Blue Star (C)	9	7	1	1	21	9	22
Navy Sea Hawks	9	6	1	2	16	11	19
Colombo	9	6	1	2	22	11	19
Renown	9	5	2	2	10	7	17
Upcountry Lions	9	5	1	3	17	8	16
Red Star	9	2	4	3	18	16	10
Defenders	9	2	4	3	12	12	10
New Youngs	9	2	1	6	13	31	7
Ratnam	9	0	3	6	5	16	3
Blue Eagles	9	0	2	7	3	16	2

SOUTH AMERICA

2022 COPA LIBERTADORES

Group Stage

Group A

Apr 6 – San Cristobal
Deportivo Tachira 0
Palmeiras 4 (Dudu 8, Veiga 35, Navarro 48, 53)

Apr 6 – Sucre
Independiente Petrolero 1 (Cristaldo 88)
Emelec 1 (Quiroga 90+1)

Apr 12 – Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 8 (Ze Rafael 41, Navarro 47, 54, 56, 78, Rony 80, Veiga 86, 90)
Independiente Petrolero 1 (Correa 6)

Apr 14 – Guayaquil
Emelec 1 (Rojas 11)
Deportivo Tachira 1 (Chacon 4)

Apr 26 – Sucre
Independiente Petrolero 1 (Campos 45)
Deportivo Tachira 2 (Uribe 44, Simisterra 65)

Apr 27 – Guayaquil
Emelec 1 (Rojas 62)
Palmeiras 3 (Rony 19, Veron 25, Breno Lopes 90+2)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	3	3	0	0	15	2	9
Dep. Tachira	3	1	1	1	3	6	4
Emelec	3	0	2	1	3	5	2
Ind. Petrolero	3	0	1	2	3	11	1

Group B

Apr 5 – Caracas
Caracas 0
Athletico Paranaense 0

Apr 7 – La Paz
The Strongest 1 (Triverio 11)
Libertad 1 (Merlini 14)

Apr 13 – Asuncion
Libertad 2 (Cardozo 3, Melgarejo 34)
Caracas 1 (Bonsu Osei 20)

Apr 14 – Curitiba
Athletico Paranaense 1 (Terans 65 pen)
The Strongest 0

Apr 26 – Asuncion
Libertad 1 (Riveros 57)
Athletico Paranaense 0

Apr 27 – La Paz
The Strongest 1 (Prost 34)
Caracas 1 (Akinyoola 83)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Ath. Paranaense	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Caracas	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
The Strongest	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Group C

Apr 6 – Braganca Paulista
Red Bull Bragantino 2 (Ytalo 35, Hurtado 90+3)
Nacional 0

Apr 7 – La Plata
Estudiantes 4 (Mas 6, Rogel 42, Del Prete 53, Zapiola 88)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Janson 35)

Apr 13 – Montevideo
Nacional 0
Estudiantes 0

Apr 14 – Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 2 (De los Santos 8, Natan 47 og)
Red Bull Bragantino 2 (Ytalo 2, 62)

Apr 26 – Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Sonora 15)
Nacional 2 (Gigliotti 31, 75)

Apr 26 – La Plata
Estudiantes 2 (Rogel 54, Boselli 59)
Red Bull Bragantino 0

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Estudiantes	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
RB Bragantino	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Nacional	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Velez Sarsfield	3	0	1	2	4	8	1

Group D

Apr 6 – Belo Horizonte
America Mineiro 0
Independiente del Valle 2 (Sornoza 12, Arce 90+5)

Apr 6 – Ibague
Tolima 0
Atletico Mineiro 2 (Fernandez 45, Tche Tche 80)

Apr 13 – Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro 1 (Ademir 85)
America Mineiro 1 (Felipe Azevedo 51)

Apr 13 – Quito
Independiente del Valle 2 (Sornoza 52, 89 pen)
Tolima 2 (Lucumi 15, Plata 41)

Apr 26 – Quito
Independiente del Valle 1 (Sornoza 50)
Atletico Mineiro 1 (Hulk 7)

Apr 27 – Belo Horizonte
America Mineiro 2 (Pedrinho 53, Hernandez 77 og)
Tolima 3 (Plata 66, 90+5, Quinones 86)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind. del Valle	3	1	2	0	5	3	5
Atl. Mineiro	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Tolima	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Am. Mineiro	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group E

Apr 5 – La Paz
Always Ready 2 (Riquelme 8 pen, Ramallo 46)
Corinthians 0

Apr 5 – Palmira
Deportivo Cali 2 (Burdisso 70, Vasquez 80)
Boca Juniors 0

Apr 12 – Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 2 (Benedetto 25, 90+6)
Always Ready 0

Apr 13 – Sao Paulo
Corinthians 1 (Caldera 68 og)
Deportivo Cali 0

Apr 26 – Sao Paulo
Corinthians 2 (Maycon 5, 78)
Boca Juniors 0

Apr 28 – La Paz
Always Ready 2 (Riquelme 35 pen, Arce 42)
Deportivo Cali 2 (Velasco 45+5 pen, Burdisso 54)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Deportivo Cali	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Always Ready	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Boca Juniors	3	1	0	2	2	4	3

Group F

Apr 6 – Lima
Alianza Lima 0
River Plate 1 (Suarez 65)

Apr 7 – Fortaleza
Fortaleza 1 (Kayzer 70)
Colo-Colo 2 (Lucero 38, Solari 49)

Apr 13 – Santiago
Colo-Colo 2 (Lucero 27, Pavez 56)
Alianza Lima 1 (Benitez 69)

Apr 13 – Buenos Aires
River Plate 2 (Fernandez 10, De la Cruz 33)
Fortaleza 0

Apr 27 – Santiago
Colo-Colo 1 (Luvero 90+2)
River Plate 2 (Suarez 82, Barco 89)

Apr 27 – Fortaleza
Fortaleza 2 (Romero 50, Hercules 79)
Alianza Lima 1 (Lavandeira 70)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
River Plate	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Colo-Colo	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Fortaleza	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Alianza Lima	3	0	0	3	2	5	0

Group G

Apr 5 – Asuncion
Olimpia 0
Cerro Porteno 0

Apr 5 – Santa Fe
Colon 2 (Rodriguez 31, Farias 90)
Penarol 1 (Ceppelini 69)

Apr 12 – Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 3 (Romero 41, 46, Espinola 70)
Colon 1 (Meza 31)

Apr 12 – Montevideo
Penarol 2 (Ramos 45+2, Carrizo 49)
Olimpia 1 (W. Gonzalez 80)

Apr 27 – Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 1 (Cardozo 45+1)
Penarol 0

Apr 28 – Asuncion
Olimpia 0
Colon 0

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Colon	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Penarol	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Olimpia	3	0	2	1	1	2	2

Group H

Apr 5 – Lima
Sporting Cristal 0
Flamengo 2 (Bruno Henrique 22, Matheuzinho 87)

Apr 6 – Cordoba
Talleres 1 (Fertoli 24)
Universidad Catolica 0

Apr 12 – Santiago
Universidad Catolica 2 (Nunez 45+2, Zampedri 90+2 pen)
Sporting Cristal 1 (Loyola 73)

Apr 12 – Rio deJaneiro
Flamengo 3 (Gabriel Barbosa 11 pen, Everton Ribeiro 26, 60)
Talleres 1 (Fertoli 45+1)

Apr 26 – Cordoba
Talleres 1 (Esquivel 65)
Sporting Cristal 0

Apr 28 – Santiago
Universidad Catolica 2 (Isla 16 og, Pablo 90+4 og)
Flamengo 3 (Gabriel Barbosa 8, 35, Lazaro 85)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	3	3	0	0	8	3	9
Talleres	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
U. Catolica	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Sporting Cristal	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

2022 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Group Stage

Group A

Apr 7 – Guayaquil
Barcelona 4 (Mastriani 9, 11, Carcelen 35, Diaz 54)
Montevideo Wanderers 2 (Rivero 14, Mendez 61)

Apr 7 – Caracas
Metropolitanos 0
Lanus 0

Apr 14 – Montevideo
Montevideo Wanderers 1 (Mendez 45+1)
Metropolitanos 1 (Flores 43 pen)

Apr 14 – Lanus
Lanus 3 (Cabral 31, Sand 74, Bernabei 82)
Barcelona SC 1 (Rodriguez 77)

Apr 28 – Montevideo
Montevideo Wanderers 0
Lanus 1 (Sand 79)

Apr 28 – Guayaquil
Barcelona SC 1 (Molina 33)
Metropolitanos 0

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lanus	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Barcelona SC	3	2	0	1	6	5	6
Metropolitanos	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Montevideo W.	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group B

Apr 7 – Cuiaba
Cuiaba 2 (Elton 78, 90+5)
Melgar 0

Apr 7 – Montevideo
River Plate 0
Racing Club 1 (Miranda 90+1)

Apr 13 – Arequipa
Melgar 2 (Cuesta 3, 78)
River Plate 0

Apr 13 – Avellaneda
Racing Club 2 (Correa 27, Joao Carlos 65 og)
Cuiaba 0

Apr 27 – Arequipa
Melgar 3 (Iberico 21, 52, Cuesta 73)
Racing Club 1 (Correa 87)

Apr 27 – Cuiaba
Cuiaba 1 (Marquinhos 48)
River Plate 2 (Salaberry 15, Lopez 45+1)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melgar	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Racing Club	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Cuiaba	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
River Plate	3	1	0	2	2	4	3

Group C

Apr 5 – Quito
Universidad Catolica 0
Union La Calera 0

Apr 5 – Banfield
Banfield 1 (Urzi 44)
Santos 0

Apr 13 – Santos
Santos 3 (Julio 15, Leo Baptistao 78 pen, Angulo 85)
Universidad Catolica 2 (Martinez Borja 26, Minda 42)

Apr 14 – Vina del Mar
Union La Calera 1 (Saez 10)
Banfield 0

Apr 27 – Quito
Universidad Catolica 2 (Diaz 51, Martinez Borja 54)
Banfield 0

Apr 28 – Vina del Mar
Union La Calera 1 (Valencia 25)
Santos 1 (Angulo 10)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Union La Calera	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
U. Catolica	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Santos	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Banfield	3	1	0	2	1	3	1

Group D

Apr 5 – Vina del Mar
Everton 1 (Di Yorio 47)
Jorge Wilstermann 1 (Osorio 23 pen)

Apr 7 – Lima
Ayacucho 2 (Barrios 7, Techera 20)
Sao Paulo 3 (Arboleda 3, Miranda 23, Luciano 88 pen)

Apr 13 – Cochabamba
Jorge Wilstermann 0
Ayacucho 2 (Duclos 9, Techera 78)

Apr 14 – Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo 2 (Arboleda 31, Talles 86)
Everton 0

Apr 26 – Vina del Mar
Everton 2 (Echeverria 55, 71)
Ayacucho 1 (Techera 61 pen)

Apr 28 – Cochabamba
Jorge Wilstermann 1 (Osorio 31 pen)
Sao Paulo 3 (Igor Gomes 23, Reinaldo 64 pen, Marquinhos 85)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sao Paulo	3	3	0	0	8	3	9
Everton	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Ayacucho	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
J. Wilstermann	3	0	1	2	2	6	1

Group E

Apr 6 – Manta
9 de Octubre 2 (Da Luz 58, 75)
Internacional 2 (Mauricio 25, Wesley 26)

Apr 7 – Asuncion
Guairena 3 (Otazu 6, Ayala 56, Arboleda 65 og)
Independiente Medellin 3 (Pons 33, Arregui 38, Cuesta 90+1)

Apr 14 – Medellin
Independiente Medellin 2 (Hernandez 9, Castrillon 90+4)
9 de Octubre 1 (Lucas 5)

Apr 14 – Porto Alegre
Internacional 1 (Paniagua 77 og)
Guairena 1 (Otazu 41)

Apr 26 – Medellin
Independiente Medellin 0
Internacional 1 (Alemao 54)

Apr 27 – Asuncion
Guairena 1 (Godoy 90+5 pen)
9 de Octubre 0

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guairena	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Internacional	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Ind. Medellin	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
9 de Octubre	3	0	1	2	3	5	1

Group F

Apr 5 – Goiania
Atletico Goianiense 4 (Jorginho 62, Shaylon 77, Hayner 87, Rickson 90+4)
LDU Quito 0

Apr 6 – Antofagasta
Deportes Antofagasta 1 (Collao 83)
Defensa y Justicia 3 (Bou 10, Tripichio 29, Merentiel 57)

Apr 12 – Florencio Varela
Defensa y Justicia 0
Atletico Goianiense 1 (Wellington Rato 9)

Apr 12 – Quito
LDU Quito 4 (Angulo 47, Cornejo 50 og, Molina 77, Arce 90+2)
Deportes Antofagasta 0

Apr 27 – Antofagasta
Deportes Antofagasta 2 (Flores 87 pen, Lopez 90)
Atletico Goianiense 1 (Gabriel Noga 45+2)

Apr 28 – Florencio Varela
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Albertengo 82)
LDU Quito 2 (Alvarado 55, 87)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atl. Goianiense	3	2	0	1	6	2	6
LDU Quito	3	2	0	1	6	5	6
Defensa y Justicia	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
D. Antofagasta	3	1	0	2	3	8	3

Group G

Apr 5 – Fortaleza
Ceara 2 (Mendoza 61 pen, Sosa 66 og)
Independiente 1 (Togni 32)

Apr 6 – Asuncion
General Caballero (JLM) 1 (Corulo 35)
Deportivo La Guiara 1 (Cumana 49)

Apr 12 – Caracas
Deportivo La Guiara 0
Ceara 2 (Vina 6, Lima 9)

Apr 12 – Avellaneda
Independiente 2 (Benegas 66, Sonora 73)
General Caballero (JLM) 0

Apr 26 – Caracas
Deportivo La Guiara 0
Independiente 2 (Blanco 67, Fernandez 90)

Apr 26 – Asuncion
General Caballero (JLM) 0
Ceara 2 (Erick 50 pen, Messias 69)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ceara	3	3	0	0	6	1	9
Independiente	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Dep. La Guiara	3	0	1	2	1	5	1
Gen. Caballero	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Group H

Apr 6 – Rio deJaneiro
Fluminense 3 (Cristiano 30, Arias 39, Zazpe 73 og)
Oriente Petrolero 0

Apr 6 – Santa Fe
Union 1 (Vera 2)
Junior 1 (Vera 6 og)

Apr 12 – Santa Cruz de la Sierra
Oriente Petrolero 1 (Dorrego 90+1)
Union 3 (Calderon 4, Peralta 70, Juarez 90+4)

Apr 13 – Barranquilla
Junior 3 (Moreno 10, Borja 45+2 pen, Sambueza 90+5)
Fluminense 0

Apr 26 – Rio deJaneiro
Fluminense 0
Union 0

Apr 28 – Santa Cruz de la Sierra
Oriente Petrolero 1 (Guaycochea 51)
Junior 3 (Albornoz 36, 66, Hinestroza 90+7)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Junior	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Union	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
Fluminense	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
O. Petrolero	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

CONCACAF

2022 CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals – 1st leg

Apr 5 – Mexico City
UNAM Pumas 2 (Dinneno 37, 45+2)
Cruz Azul 1 (Tabo 83)

Apr 6 – Seattle
Seattle Sounders 3 (Rusnak 16, Morris 34, Lodeiro 68 pen)
New York City FC 1 (Andrade 27)

Semi-finals – 2nd leg

Apr 12 – Mexico City
Cruz Azul 0
UNAM Pumas 0
UNAM Pumas win 2-1 on aggregate

Apr 13 – NewJersey
New York City FC 1 (Rodriguez 51)
Seattle Sounders 1 (Ruidiaz 28)
Seattle Sounders win 4-2 on aggregate

BELIZE

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Verdes (C)	10	9	1	0	28	2	28
Altitude	10	5	3	2	15	8	18
San Pedro Pirates	10	5	2	3	15	7	17
Garden City	10	2	3	5	7	19	9
Caesar Ridge	10	2	1	9	9	26	7
Wagiya	10	1	2	7	7	19	5

BERMUDA

Final standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dandy Town Hornets (C)	20	18	1	1	59	15	55
Pembroke Hamilton	20	15	3	2	83	23	48
Devonshire Cougars	20	11	5	4	40	18	38
North Village Rams	20	9	4	7	47	21	31
Somerset Trojans	20	8	5	7	38	29	29
Robin Hood	20	8	4	8	41	36	28
St. George's Colts	20	7	5	8	32	32	26
X-Roads Warriors	20	7	1	12	29	62	22
Devonshire Colts (R)	20	4	4	12	21	43	16
Southampton Rangers (R)	20	3	2	15	20	82	11
Somerset Eagles (R)	20	2	2	16	24	73	8

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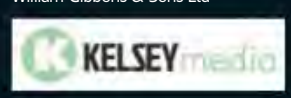

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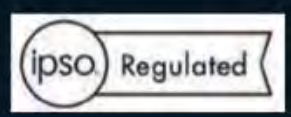

Rio Ferdinand

Manchester United 1 Chelsea 1

2008 Champions League final, Moscow
(Manchester United won 6-5 on penalties)

Rio Ferdinand won it all in a glittering career at Manchester United. Yet while he looks back on the 2008 Champions League final win against Chelsea as his greatest moment, it also offers a reminder of what else he could have won...

Biggest game... Ferdinand won his only Champions League winners' medal in 2008

"When I started out in the game, I always looked at other teams winning trophies with a hint of envy. Manchester United and Arsenal were winning everything and you wanted to be part of that, to get those medals. When I joined Manchester United that desire grew even stronger; this was a club built to succeed.

They talk about United's treble-winning team in 1999, but I would argue that our 2008 team was even better. Cristiano Ronaldo at his best, Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez alongside him up front – that's as good a front three as you will get. Paul Scholes in midfield at his best, Ryan Giggs on the wing, me and Vida [Nemanja Vidic] at the back and Edwin van der Sar in goal – it was a great team, but we needed to be because Jose Mourinho had built a strong Chelsea team and Arsenal were still a threat at that time as well.

When I look back at the 2008 Champions League final, it's just the euphoria at the end that comes to mind. You forget everything else when you win the Champions League. It's the ultimate, the pinnacle of our sport and we should have won it more in my time at United.

The game was intense. The rain in Moscow is an image everyone remembers and John Terry's penalty miss in the shootout was decisive, but we got the win. That medal will always be there and I'm on the list of Champions League winners, but I always feel we could have won it two or three times.

We won a lot at Manchester United. I was lucky to be part of a great team, to have incredible team-mates and to work for the greatest manager of all time, but I still find myself sitting back and feeling gutted about the finals we lost that we should have won. I think: 'I can't believe we didn't win that one' and 'we should have won this'.

How the hell did we lose that 2009 FA Cup semi-final against Everton? Then you look back at the two Champions League finals against Barcelona [in 2009 and 2011], I'd love to have won at least one of them. Then that crazy FA Cup final against Arsenal we should have won easily in 2005 – how did we lose that? Look at that game and tell me how we didn't win it with the chances we created and the dominance we had?

It still kills me thinking about what we should have won because those trophies were there for the taking.

My medals are in a box at home. I don't look at them too much, it's not what I want to do right now. Maybe there will be a day when I'll say I had a great career, but it takes time to get to that moment.

That desire for more success is what makes you a winner."

> "My medals are in a box at home. I don't look at them too much"

European champion... Ferdinand celebrates with Wes Brown

Rio Ferdinand was speaking to Kevin Palmer at a BT Sport event

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